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ABSTRACT

This two-part source book offers administrators both general information for effective communications in public education and case studies describing methods used by individual Texas school districts to solve communications problems. General articles include guidelines for working with the news media, producing school newsletters, developing a school board member communications program, using computers and word processors for effective communications, and speech writing. Presented as case studies are a program using principals and teachers to enhance the school image, efforts at influencing voters in two districts' successful bond issues, an adopt-a-school program, a community-school communication improvement project, an internal communications plan, a volunteer program, communications procedures in closing a school, how to build a new communications program, enlisting parent participation in a partners in education project, a communications solution to vandalism, crisis communications, and a friends of education community relations project. A "blooper" and a success story conclude the collection. (MJL)

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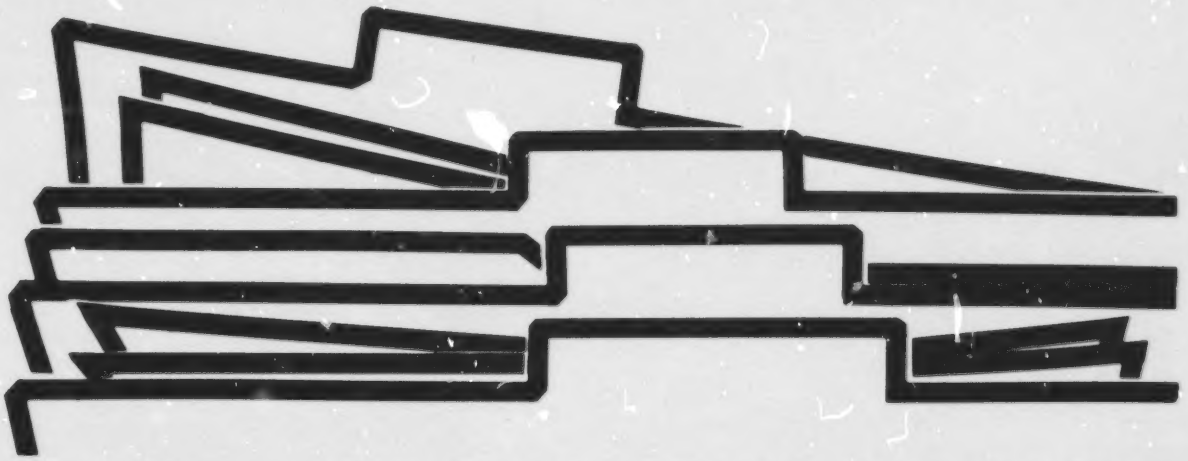

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Texas Education Agency
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FOREWORD

Case Studies In School Communication will help Texas school administrators analyze and meet the information needs of their many publics more effectively. Each chapter presents an overview of a specific problem—and the proven techniques used to find its solution.

The suggestions presented in this series of articles and case sudies may be adapted to the management requirements of school districts in all areas of the state.

Raymon L. Bynum
Commissioner of Education

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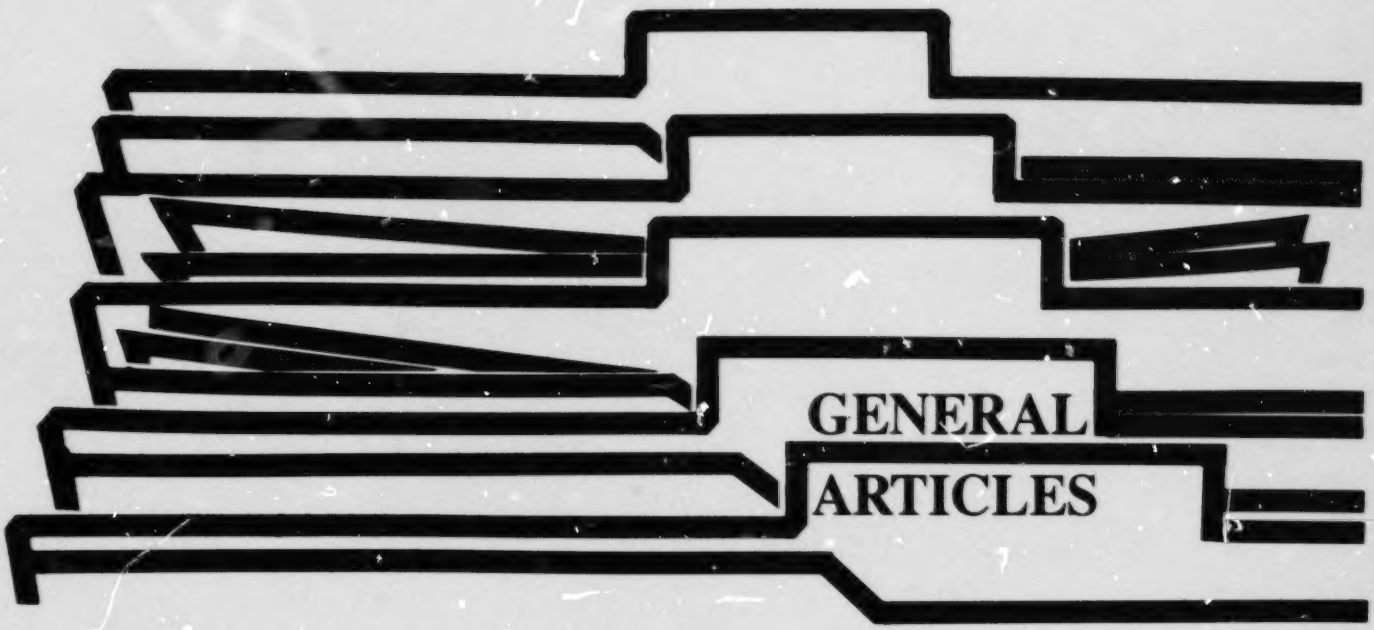
INTRODUCTION

Case Studies In School Communication is the first handbook developed cooperatively by a state department of education and a state chapter of the National School Public Relations Association.

This publication, third in a series of communications handbooks published by the Texas Education Agency, is divided into two sections: General Articles and Case Studies. The first presents a combined philosophical-professional basis for meeting the information needs of public education. The second provides a series of step-by-step accounts of the methods used to solve internal and external communications problems.

Together, they offer the school administrator a highly professional source book as the district continues to develop its own communications program.


GENERAL
ARTICLES

Working With The News Media
Ysleta Independent School District

A local newspaper editor spoke at a district-wide teacher inservice. After his talk, he opened the floor to questions. As the questions were asked and answered, one teacher stated that the news media have been printing and broadcasting a lot of negative stories about low student scores.

The editor agreed.

"What," the teacher asked, "can schools do to motivate newspapers to write better stories?"

The editor replied, "Improve student scores."

Foul, you may cry! We are doing a good job in our schools. Students **are** learning.

But the editor's response reflects the media; and, according to the 1983 Gallup Poll on education, the general public's growing concern and criticism about the quality of education in our schools.

In light of the numerous and well-publicized reports on the so-called demise of public education, school districts have a responsibility to the public, their student body, their faculty and staff, and to themselves as a public entity to disseminate the good news that occurs in their school system. This statement is not to be construed as a proposal for a propaganda blitz. Nor is it a proposal to hide from the public problems that might exist in a school district. Rather, it is stated on the assumption that your school district is providing a sound education.

The strategy for reaching the general public should include an organized approach to providing information to the news media with an aggressive plan for gathering news story ideas from within your school disrict. This plan should include designating individuals at each campus to be responsible for collecting news-worthy ideas and then sending them to a central gathering point for dissemination to the news media.

So What Is Newsworthy?

The best way to learn the basic qualities of what makes a newsworthy story is to read your local paper and observe television and radio reports. Study the content. Try to determine what it is about the situation or individual that drew the report's attention and caused the assignment editor to decide the story was worth the time...the writing...the news space.

By familiarizing yourself with the various columns and reports, you will have armed yourself with knowledge that will make for a more efficient approach to working with the news media.

Also, success in acquiring the news coverage you want requires a good working relationship with your local reporter and assignment editor. The problem is that no crystal ball, secret system or foolproof formula exists for achieving that ideal.

There is comfort, however, in the fact that most of the time, simple common sense can be followed.

Basic Application of Honesty

A basic application of honesty is probably the most important single ingredient for a successful media relations program.

That this is not exactly easy to come by was recognized over 2,000 years ago by Diogenes in his search for an honest man.

Closely tied to the matter of honesty is the temptation to indulge in manipulation of the media. This Machiavellian approach, however, simply does not work. P.T. Barnum might have said that you can fool some of the media some of the time but not all of the media all of the time. Sooner or later, such tactics will send their master down the drain.

There is the subject of personality. Compatible body chemistry, whatever that really is, helps.

If it's not there, common grounds can be discovered. A little thought and consideration are valuable in this respect.

A Feeling of Empathy

Next to the importance of a sense of honesty in working with the media is probably a feeling of empathy for the particular individual involved. Incidentally, before we elaborate on this, try to eliminate from your language such phrases as "dealing with the media" or "handling the media." The subconscious implications of such talk are not at all flattering.

With the pressures of time, the need for empathy is often ignored. Put yourself in the reporter's place. Learn the deadlines being faced. Visualize what the particular reporter must go through on a beat, and the problems of finding newsworthy material that editors will print. Then try to determine how you can assist in the construction of a "fair" news report.

We put the word "fair" in quotes because there are quite frequently varying definitions of what "fair" really means.

The reporter has a professional obligation to be fair, and you, likewise, share this responsibility. It is inevitable, as we have said, that there may be honest differences of opinion. Many times these differences are not of significance and may well be overlooked. Sometimes they are the result of misunderstandings, of haste with the pressure of deadlines, of poor editing on the copy desk, of omissions from the reporter's copy resulting from space or time problems, of your poorly-phrased remarks, or of poor listening on the part of one or both persons in the discussion.

Of Sticky Situations and Credibility

We've talked about gathering news ideas and about treating the press fairly. What happens when things get "sticky" and the press is inquiring about a subject or program that is being studied, when no decision has yet been made, or when all concerned and responsible parties are not yet privy to the problem. This is where the media may report that you said "no comment." The implications of this phrase are damaging. The public generally jumps to the conclusion that you are covering up "some secret." Your credibility suffers. In such cases, to avoid such categorization, say something rather than nothing, be candid within the limitations imposed by the situation, try to give a time when the subject will be presented publicly, or when an interview may be possible. Also, remember that nothing you say is "off the record." The real world is simply not off the record.

All of which compels us to remind the practitioner of good relations with the media that life is very complex, that no one is perfect, and that even the daily humdrum can be fraught with frustrations. A major preventive to emotional stress over media reporting is the development of a thick skin. This, plus a positive attitude, and a determination to disregard the non-essential misfortunes, is better medicine than all the vitamins combined, and provides a guarantee against paranoia and cynicism.

Catch words and phrases are popular these days. "Openness" in dealing with the press is one of them. We believe we've covered openness in our discussion of "honesty." Openness is somewhat of a misnomer, an oversimplification. Despite the news reporter's desire that district personnel be open, there are legal provisions for boards of trustees to go into executive session where there is no openness. The right to individual privacy and matters of good taste sometimes very sensibly limit what is open. The word "openness" has various degrees of meaning, depending on the subject, while "honesty" is a broader term. However, the basic right of the public to know in a democracy and the growing participation of the public in the democratic process increases the school district's responsibility for being responsive to inquiries of all kinds at all times.

Getting Your Share of Press Coverage

In an attempt to receive press coverage, many people immediately think of the "press release" as a means of getting the news out. Yet,

the very wording implies that here are some facts from a reservoir of possibly withheld material. "Media information" might be better, but why must any such wording be at the top of material going to the media? The very worst is the loose use of the word, "handout." For that matter, why "immediate release" or release on a future date? The arrival of an article in a news room signals for all practical purposes that the story is for use whenever the editor desires. If it's big news and there's a release date, many editors go ahead and use it immediately. If it's not important, many do not have time to worry about the date of the story when it goes into the computer. Finally, why the big heading at the top of the story? In many cases, it may lessen the curiosity of the editorial person scanning incoming material for good news stories. Try putting the name of the organization, the responsible party and the telephone number at the bottom of the story, even if it's more than one page.

Anyway, the old press release seems to have seen its day. Except for small items, it has been altered into a statement with almost all information to be rewritten by a reporter at a computer terminal. If you're seeking coverage of an event or a program, consider which reporter or writer or television station might be interested. Based upon your knowledge gained from studying the local news media, make some phone calls, and then send along what looks like a memo. With complex material, this memo might follow the lines of a query to a magazine on a possible article.

Above all, don't be discouraged. Trends come and go with newspapers and the electronic media. Sometimes the pendulum of reporting swings to extremes, editorial policies do the same, but common sense generally prevails as the technologies evolve.

In summary, your chief assets are a sense of honesty, empathy, clarity, accuracy, timing, imagination coupled with vision, a low-keyed self-confidence, and a good disposition.

One Reporter's Perspective

By Bill Loving
El Pcso Herald Post

It comes down to personality. No I don't mean how well you get along with the reporters and editor of your local newspaper, although that has something to do with it.

No, the personality I'm talking about lies in the makeup of your school district. A district that seems timid or cold isn't going to make many friend in the media. And oftentimes that degree of friendship of goodwill, if you will, decides how much play you get in the news.

A district that is open, in which the employees from lowest janitor to superintendent and board member are willing to talk, is the district that can look forward to being in the news. If your district seems small minded, closed or just plain reticent to cooperate with the press in daily affairs, it can expect less.

That doesn't mean that you can avoid many of the headaches associated with the media by trying to shut them out. You may be effective in stopping some stories, but reporters and their editors have a habit of finding a lot of those embarrassing stories you would just as soon see out of print.

What you will be missing are the light feature stories that can lead to a better image among voters come school bond election time. It can also foster more understanding of your particular problems and accomplishments at a time when educators are feeling the heat from concerned parents, pressure groups and headline hunting politicians.

Remember, a good newspaper can reach a lot more people in one edition than you will during month of public meetings.

How To Improve Media Relationships

With this in mind, here are a few suggestions as to how you can improve your relations with media:

1. **Be open with reporters.** Remember that they have jobs to do and they need your cooperation to explain school issues and put them into perspective. Expect to be called at unusual hours of the day or night. Newspaper deadlines respect no ones' sleep, dinner or recreation time.
2. **Encourage your staffs to open up with reporters.** If you discourage such interaction you are only hurting your district. Reporters may not be able to get the information they need and might wind up publishing incomplete or inaccurate stories. If your district can't or won't give them the information they need, they'll go somewhere else, either another school district or perhaps teacher groups whose point of view may not correspond with your own.
3. **Make a full disclosure of any embarrassing situations.** Stonewalling generally does little good. If the situation in your school is rotten, someone will speak out. Get the reputation for concealing the facts and few people will believe you when you do tell the truth.

   It may hurt for a while to admit that you and your district did do something wrong but you will only compound your problems if you read in the paper that you lied as well. Later, if you are involved in a controversy in which you are blameless, the reputation you built up will come back and haunt or help you.
4. **Get to know your newspapers' editors.** These are the people who will be writing those editorials when you go to the voters for a new school tax or bond issue. A word of caution though. Do not try to go around reporters by working through their editors. A good editor will respect his or her reporters, and a good reporter will only become suspicious when he sees you closeted with his editor while he is working on a story.
5. **Be prepared for some errors in stories.** No matter how diligent the reporter, he may sometimes make a mistake. Do not reject, out of hand, all reporters for these errors. Take the matter up with them. No good reporter likes errors, especially in his work. Let him know that an error occurred. Chances are you will not see it again.

   Don't assume that just because a reporter is nodding along while you talk of taxes and state aid, that he or she understands what you are saying. Encourage reporters to ask questions to be sure they understand what is going on. If you consistently have a problem with a particular reporter, speak with his immediate superior, his city editor. Many times problems can be resolved this way. Going directly to the newspaper's editor can sometimes be like using an anvil to swat a fly.
6. **Be prepared for editors who don't like you or your school district.** Newspapers are no different from any other type of large organization and personalities sometimes play larger parts in decisions than they should.

   You may find yourself in conflict with an editor or publisher. When this happens you can only hope that their attitudes will change or they will be changed. Do not fight your battle through your subordinates and their reporters. Reporters usually don't care about the personality problems of their superiors. You can do a lot to help your case by being reasonable. A good reporter can usually work around an editor or publisher and sometimes explain your side of a story in a way that will help lessen animosities. Remember that you do yourself no good by perpetuating the image of a belligerent in the news room. Give reporters and their city editors credit for more integrity than that.
7. **Hire a good public relations person to handle many of the stories that go through.** You may find that they may be more effective in communicating to parents and teachers through district programs.

Don't expect your PR person to get stories in the newspaper. Reporters like to develop their own stories (it's a personality quirk of good reporters) and you'll find that the best stories are those that reporters "stumble" into.

8. **Don't be afraid to speak out and take controversial stands on issues affecting education.** This is especially true of national or state issues. Be sure you know what you're talking about.

   By speaking out you keep yourself in the news and build up a reputation in the community and the news room. That can come in handy if you become locked into a fight with your board, teachers, or pressure groups.

9. **Don't try to use the media for your personal reasons.** Editors and reporters don't like being used. They are accustomed to dealing with politicians and other special interest groups that try that routine daily.
10. **Don't be afraid of "bad" stories.** There are no such things. There are stories that you might not want to see in print, but they are not necessarily bad. They simply point out conditions in your schools that can be changed. It has been said that there is no such thing as bad publicity. It is an arguable point. But in these times with much more public attention on education, publicity is virtually impossible to avoid.

Schools and Newsletters
Region IV Education Service Center

Junk mail has become part of our American way of life. Unasked-for-catalogues, give-away prize letters, sale-of-a-lifetime fliers are the attempts of business to reach selected groups of consumers. Direct mail advertising is a multi-million dollar business. It would hardly continue if it were not profitable.

Direct mail advertising works because it targets potential buyers. The key word is "targets." A specific message is sent to a specific audience.

In a similar fashion, public schools can put a kind of "direct mail advertising" to good use for positive public relations. By targeting specific audiences with specific messages through newsletters, schools can make effective use of this business strategy.

Newsy Letters—A School Essential

The National School Public Relations Association says that a school district without a newsletter is like a helicopter without a rotor—it is reasonably certain that both will wind up in flames.

A school system cannot rely on the news media or word-of-mouth to spread good news. A school district has to tell its own positive story, and one of the best ways to do that is with a newsletter. In fact NSPRA concludes that a factual, attractive, inexpensive newsletter is essential to an effective school communications program.

A newsletter is, at the basic level, a **letter** with **news** about what is going on in the schools. It is really a hybrid form combining elements of a personal letter and a newspaper. As such, an effective newsletter will

- Concentrate on substantive information about areas of interest to the specified audience.
- Follow the KISS maxim: Keep It Short and Simple.
- Involve the reader through the use of informal, jargon-free language.
- Use an appropriate format designed to "capture" the reader.

Content of Newsletters

An effective newsletter is written with the reader in mind. It contains information the reader wants to know, and its emphasis is on news. Target an audience with the newsletter—staff, parents, taxpayers, senior citizens—and tell them what's going on in the school that affects them. Share the good, positive things with them. Involve them with real or potential problems and the steps being taken to solve them.

School newsletters often contain articles written by students or teachers describing classroom activities. It is the editor's responsibility, however, to insure that these articles say something and say it well.

Style

Newsletters are written from people to people, never institution to institution. Keep the text personal. Talk about "our school" and "our children." The writing shouldn't sound as though it was written for an education journal.

The language of a newsletter should be informal. It should be conversational in tone and personal in nature. Sentences should be short and uncomplicated. Use active verbs. Passive writing is guaranteed to be dull.

Avoid educational jargon. Many parents do not understand what "cognitive" and "affective" mean, and they probably think that "interdisciplinary" has something to do with conduct. Use plain English.

Format/Design

Newsletter formats vary widely. Usually printed on 8½ x 11 inch paper, most build on

the positive attributes of a personal letter: intimate, individual contact between sender and recipient. The format you choose should be attractive and readable. Determine what the emphasis of your newletter should be and then design a format that makes that emphasis visible.

These design tips may be of aid to you in deciding on a format.

- Keep paragraphs short and separated by white space. Extra spaces between paragraphs will increase readership by an average 12 percent.
- Begin paragraphs with a large initial letter. This will also increase readership.
- Help the reader into the paragraph with "arrowheads", "bullets", asterisks and other graphic devices.
- Keep your opening paragraph to a minimum of 11 words. A long first paragraph frightens readers away.
- Break up the monotony of long copy by setting key paragraphs in bold face or italic type.

Headlines, Captions and Subheads

- Use headlines to break up the grayness of a page and to point out important stories.
- Headlines should reveal something of substance about the story; avoid "titles" for your articles.

Other secrets about art in newsletters might include:

- Art and photographs must fit into the whole. They must entice readership rather than simply adorn the page.
- Visit your local art supply house. A good stock of ruling tape, transfer lettering and design elements, shading screens and decorative tape will permit you to be creative with your art presentation.
- Photographs should be large enough to convey a message. Cropping must indicate emphasis. Contrast photos do better than gray ones for printing.
- Limit the number of people in each photo. Groups of more than three probably should be avoided.
- Shoot freely when on photographic assignment. Black and white shots are less than a dime a frame of film.
- A display subhead of two or three lines between the headline and the body copy will heighten the reader's appetite for the feast to come.
- After two or three inches of copy, insert a cross-head. Therefore, pepper cross-heads throughout the newsletter. They keep the reader marching forward and can deliver the substance of your message to those who will not read all of the text.
- For typewritten newsletters, use transfer lettering or a larger typewriter face for headlines. For variety, replace formal headlines with boldface lead-ins, underscored wording in the first sentence of a paragraph, first lines that stick out into the left margin.

Art can be used effectively in a newsletter. Photographs, line art, clip art and even student drawings can dress up your newsletter. One warning: no art at all is better than bad art.

Production: Typography

Presenting the printed word in a way that enhances the message and invites reading is a job every newsletter editor must face squarely. The best article in the world is of little significance if its not read. Use these suggestions to increase readership:

- Set up the page in two or three columns of type. A good rule of thumb for width is not more than 40 characters. Most people acquire reading habits from newspapers that use columns of about 26 characters. The wider the measure, the fewer the readers.
- Type smaller than 9-point is difficult to read. Most authorities recommend 10- or 11-point type.
- Serif type is easier to read than sans serif in body copy.
- Sans serif type is more effective than serif in headlines or display copy.
- Typewriter type can be sharpened by reducing it two or three percent before printing.

Production: Printing

There is a production technique to fit every budget. Some schools are able to use their own offset equipment or to job out newsletters to commercial printers. Others must use mimeograph techniques or even the lowly spirit duplicator. The key is care and good taste. Sloppiness will ruin a newsletter no matter what technique is used. A carefully produced ditto newsletter is preferred to a messy, gray printed one.

- Choose paper carefully. It should fit your needs, your budget and the story you wish to tell. Texture and weight contribute to the "feel" of yor newsletter. Paper color creates a mood, a personality for the product. Choose paper with discrimination and in consultation with your paper merchant or printer.
- Inks must, likewise, be chosen carefully. Black is always the most serviceable choice for body copy.
- Halftones print better on harder, less textured paper. If halftones are of people, avoid blue and green inks. Blue looks anemic and green gives you monsters. Be careful about paper colors, too.
- The name or banner page of the newsletter can be printed in bulk at one printing. This is an economical way of adding color to the newsletter. As each issue is printed, thereafter, only black ink is required.

If your newsletter will be printed by a commercial printing firm, the National School Public Relations Association suggests these guidelines:

- Know the printer. If you choose a printer through a bidding process, get to know the shop before a contract is signed. Assure yourself that the printer can produce the material you envision.
- Know the capabilities of the printer's equipment.
- Write specifications carefully and clearly.
- Make sure that your copy is neat and that instructions are specific and clear.
- Prepare a dummy. Don't make the printer guess. You'll lose.
- Check proofs carefully and quickly.
- Stick to your promises; insist that the printer stick to his.

Distribution

There are two basic forms of delivery for school newsletters. One method, an external procedure, uses the US Postal Service or some other collateral system. The other, an internal procedure, uses either the inter-school mail system or "kid mail."

When using the federal mail or other system, remember these tips:

- Large mailings are expensive at first class rates. Check with postal officials about non-profit bulk rates.
- Mailing labels should be used for large volume mailings which are repeatedly sent to the same basic group of people. Office copy machines or computers can produce cost-effective labels.
- Presort mail for faster delivery and check with the post office for ways to speed up and economize in using the federal mails.

Schools may rely on other external means of newsletter delivery. Review these tips:

- Distribute newsletters through local businesses. Place stacks of newsletters at banks, realtors, barber and beauty shops, groceries, department stores and restaurants.
- Use school organizations or youth groups for door-to-door delivery as a service project.
- Include the newsletter as an advertising insert to the Sunday newspaper. Often this rate will be lower than postal rates.

Now about "kid mail." Every school uses students at one time or another to deliver messages to parents. In most cases, this form of mail is reasonably efficient, and the price is certainly right—but there is one major drawback. Kids don't always take the things home. Tips to follow in the use of "kid mail" include:

- Make the job of carrying the mail important in the eyes of the student. Stress the significance of the message to the student.
- Give the student a share in the message. Let the student add a short personal note or even

address the envelope. Such activities provide "ownership" in the message.

- Include a "return" message form or card for the parent to send back to the school. This serves as a checking system.

Evaluation

How do you know if your newsletter is doing its job? Feedback should be used to make adjustments in the newsletter to ensure continued or increased readership.

The most effective way to get feedback is to ask your readers for it. Solicit mailed comments, perhaps with a short questionnaire in one issue each year. Ask for comments at a PTA meeting. Make random phone calls to parents.

Feedback, both good and bad, may come without solicitation, too. Make sure the name, address and telephone number of the editor is prominently displayed on the masthead of the newsletter.

Conclusion

Effective school public relations programs depend on reaching out into the community for support. Part of that reaching out is to manage the information flow from school to targeted audiences. The school newsletter, designed to meet the needs and interests of each targeted audience, is an invaluable tool in school communications management.

Board Member Communications Program
Texas Association of School Boards

It wasn't too many years ago that Americans were very accepting and supportive of how their public schools were run. Today that's all changed. In the 1980s we deal with a public that's far more sophisticated and knowledgeable. They're also more critical and much less inclined to rubber stamp the actions of the school establishment. For that reason communicating effectively has become more important than ever. Reinstilling confidence in our public education system must become a top priority.

Public schools must "sell" themselves, not by sales gimmicks and tricks but by honestly telling the school story, by opening their doors to public scrutiny and meaningful community involvement.

Reinforce Public Confidence

If you are a school board member, you have an especially important role in this effort to reinforce public confidence. More than ever, you must learn to communicate to combat the threat to local control of our schools. Court decisions, legislative mandates, and teacher militancy are just a few of the elements that have combined to weaken school boards' authority and undermine citizen responsibility. It is crucial and absolutely necessary that board members use every legitimate means to insure the public knows and appreciates the contributions public schools make to society. People must be convinced that the public school system best reflects the ideals and aspirations of our citizens. They must recognize that the public education system still provides the best means for producing citizens equipped to contribute toward maintenance of a democratic government and better way of life for all Americans.

For this "case study" on development of a board member communications program, we will deal not with any one district specifically but with school districts in general. Every district is unique and communications programs must be adapted to meet an individual district's needs. There are no magic formulas for success, no easy ways to avoid failure. But there are some basic rules that a school district can follow to get a head start in moving public opinion in the right direction.

Address Six Basics First

The establishment of a sound board communications program is part of creating the school district's network for positive communications. But before that program can be effective, six basics must be defined.

First: you must have a school program worth selling. The purpose of a board communications program is to win support and involvement of the community. The purpose should never be to cover up a poor educational program or badly run school system. If the school fails to do a good job in turning out graduates who can function effectively as citizens and as productive individuals, no communications program, no matter how well designed and implemented, can be successful.

Second: there must be commitment to communicating. The board and the district must believe in the value of its communication program and must be willing to commit the time and resources necessary to carry the program through. That commitment must be communicated and shared by the entire school community.

Third: you must have a policy. Commitment to an effective communications program can be expressed by establishing official authorization for the program through a formally adopted board policy. That policy should spell out the educational philosophy of the district as well as objectives. It should be explicit in stating that the communications program is an integral step in attaining the district's educational goals

and that, as such, it will be allocated an appropriate share of district resources.

Fourth: an organization needs to be established to carry out the district's and board's communication policy. The type of organization will be determined by the district's size, the community, and the available resources. Even if a district can't afford a full-time communications or public relations person, someone in the system should be given responsibility for this important program.

Fifth: a well-constructed program is necessary to carry through the district's communications efforts. A program must be devised that will embody the district's educational philosophy. It should be based on complete and accurate information and make use of effective techniques directed toward appropriate publics. In addition, you will want to take advantage of the most effective media to reach those different publics.

Sixth: you must have evaluation and followup. Steps should be taken to measure the effectiveness of your communications program and to make sure your district is getting the best value for its public relations dollars.

Follow Three-Step Process

Once you've recognized the importance of these basics, you can begin to design an effective communications program. That process consists of three steps.

1. **Define your goals and establish objectives.** What do you hope to achieve through better communications? Develop objectives that are both long and short range. Remember, the overall goal should be to establish a favorable climate in which to operate your schools. Objectives should be reviewed frequently and restated in light of changing conditions and needs. Whatever your purposes are, they should be clearly delineated and put into writing as a guide and reference for board members and the rest of the communications team.
2. **Identify your publics.** Who needs to hear what you have to say? Who are the groups that need to be on the receiving end for all school communications? Which groups should be contacted only for special purposes? Who are yor support groups? Who are the groups who will try to block your efforts? Where should special efforts be concentrated for the long term? For the short term? Make lists. Your list of publics, for example, might include parents, senior citizens, business and industry leaders, influential citizens, ethnic leaders, religious leaders, government officials, etc. Don't forget that employees and students can be your most effective ambassadors between schools and the public. Too often we take their support for granted, and they are uninformed as to district philosophy and goals.
3. **Plan your strategies.** Once publics are identified you must then decide how to conduct the communications program. Again the overall goal is to establish a favorable climate in which to operate the schools. That means the public relations program must be much more than the occasional issuing of a news release or putting out a slick brochure, newsletter or annual report. Good communications is never a one shot effort. Public relations means people communicating with people. Good will toward schools doesn't just happen. It is only the result of a continuous, constant effort to inform the public and be completely honest with them.

Design Is Critical

Your program must consist of careful information gathering and sensitivity to public, employee and student attitudes. In deciding how to reach your publics, you need a broad understanding of people—how they think, act and react. And remember, people may act one way as individuals but in an entirely different way as a group. Any plan for reaching publics should include procedures not only for on-going, day-

to-day communications, but also strategies to meet crises and special situations.
special situations.

Because so many traditional methods of communication have lost effectiveness or credibility, new ways to communicate must be sought. Even though people still look to newspapers as a chief source of information about schools, the average news item receives a 12 percent readership. Further, that information may be incomplete or may omit what your district wants most to communicate. It may also emphasize the negative rather than the positive aspects of your program. Don't think communication is limited to printed or published materials. Face-to-face contact is still a powerful medium in molding public opinion.

Be flexible. Try to innovate. Bear in mind there are no hard or fast rules or one single method for successful communication. And don't wait for your publics to come to you. Reach out to them. Provide speakers for community groups and civic organizations. Encourage your administrators and staffs to join such groups.

Establish advisory committees. Invite citizens with special knowledge or abilities to serve as resource people for schools. Make sure visitors to your schools are treated with warmth and courtesy. Make certain that requests for information or complaints are handled graciously and quickly. Make parent visitations pleasant and interesting experiences. Remember, everything said and done in the schools can either add to or detract from your image with the public.

Remember Four Basic Tenets

In summary, building an effective and positive board communications program depends on four basic tenets:

1. Operate a good school program. The people who make up your constituency must believe students are being well educated at a reasonable cost. Without a majority believing this, you will have no basis for public confidence.
2. Involve all residents of the district in the school. Make sure their presence creates a positive difference they can see.
3. Communicate in a wide variety of planned and formal ways. Be flexible and innovative.
4. Be open and honest. If you are, people will perceive you as someone they can trust—in whom they have confidence.

Without a good school program, without meaningful involvement, without planned communication, and without an image of being open, honest and trustworthy, no district and no board will ever have—or deserve—the public confidence.

Too often we look upon public relations as a means of insuring financial support, a way to pass bond issues or prevent outbursts when votes come up on tax increases. But board members have a much greater responsibility—to let citizens know we are doing a good job and are succeeding better than any other country in history in providing free public education to all citizens.

Look upon your board communications program and your district's public relations program as an opportunity, not just an obligation, and you will be well on your way to creating an effective network for positive communications.

Technology Expands School PR
Dallas Independent School District

Computers and word processors—products of the "high tech" society—are changing the reach, scope and effectiveness of the Communications Department of the Dallas Independent School District.

Computer literacy has been described as an ability and willingness to use a computer as a day-to-day tool to do the kind of information work that is most important in our everyday lives. For members of the Communications Department, that has meant gaining access to information, reading and writing, analyzing situations, communicating with others, storing and retrieving information, and thinking through problems.

Video screens and keyboards have sprouted throughout department offices at the School Administration Building. Secretaries now produce letter-perfect documents more rapidly on word processors. Central office word processors are linked together via telephone to allow employees to "talk" to others through the computer, access remote data sources, and send camera-ready copy to other school districts across the country or directly to the print shop across town where it is automatically set in type.

Word Processor Improves Quality

There's no longer an excuse for misspelling a word, since an automatic dictionary checks the spelling of each word against a word-processing program of 10,000 words. Staff members have found that the word processor improves the quality of their writing along with their productivity. With the punch of a few keys, a staff member can automatically cause the right-hand margin of copy to line up as neatly and evenly as the left margin, just like a page in a book. Paragraphs of a story can be moved around on a page, or from one page to another, or be deleted. The same is true of words or sentences.

Information is power, and staff members are making their computers even more powerful by interconnecting them with telephone lines, cables, and satellites. Staff members can sit at their desks and make airline and hotel reservations, look over a restaurant guide from another major city, receive daily education news from the National School Public Relations Association, or read UPI sports, weather, stock markets, and hundreds of other items on the SOURCE computer network.

Education news from the Texas Legislature is carried during legislative sessions on a special subscription network of the Texas Association of School Boards. The Council of Great City Schools in Washington, D.C., also has its own network to which the district belongs. The organization sends national education news to the DISD on a weekly basis. A computer program consultant is now in the process of helping the Communications Department plan new ways to gather information by interconnecting various offices.

DISD "Wired" for Cable

In addition, schools in the DISD are now being "wired" for cable television, and once this is completed, the district will be able to establish a communications network with all its schools through the cable TV system. In fact, it is estimated that there will be two million computers in public schools by 1988—as compared to the 40,000 in the country three years ago.

Courses are already being offered via computer. In the future, many students will be "telecommuting" to class. Students will read lectures, get homework assignments, take quizzes, ask questions, interact with other students and the instructor—all electronically. Classes will meet anytime they are ready—in the convenience of a home or office—and there will be no dress code!

What does this mean to the school public relations person in your school district? More changes are coming—pocket data terminals, FM signal data transmission, two-way small "dish" satellite communication, and cellular radio.

In November 1983, State Board of Education chairman Joe Kelly Butler of Houston announced the formation of an advisory committee to plan the development of a statewide information and telecommunications instruction system. The work of this committee, said Butler, will be far-reaching and have tremendous impact on the future of telecommunications development in Texas.

Either we in the communications business learn to incorporate electronic technology into our jobs, or someone else will. School public relations personnel must become involved and learn what is available. The communications and technology revolution won't go away. The technology is ready now and it's changing our world— and that is where we will live and work the rest of our lives.

Elements of A Good Speech
Dallas Independent School District

Developing A Working Relationship With Your Speaker

1. Study your superintendent (or board members) for personality, manner of speech, frequently used phrases and stands on issues until you become an extension of his or her mind or, as one speech writer put it, "a clone."
2. Set up a schedule which ideally would include:
   - An initial conference in which you make notes on the speaker's main thoughts on the subject or find out it's strictly your project
   - A second conference as a rough draft or the main points of the speech are developed
   - Attendance at the function where the speech is to be made with notes taken on audience reaction, etc.
   - Critique of the speech with the speaker for mutual improvement

Doing An Audience Analysis

Contact the person who requested the speaker and find out the following information:

1. Size and make-up of audience (ethnic, sex, educational background, etc.)
2. Facts about organization
3. Purpose of speech
4. Length of speech. Will there be a question and answer period? If so, get expected types of questions and give speaker sample answers if the subject is one where statistics, quotes, etc., would be impressive. Will audience involvement activities be expected? If so, design an approach you think will work with that particular group.
5. Any unusual features of the meeting room
6. Make arrangements for any A-V or other special equipment the speaker will need.
7. In the community—find out the group's general attitude toward the school district and if there have been any recent problems. Get specific projects or examples of support the speaker can brag on the audience about. Use the opportunity to make the speaker seem very knowledgeable and appreciative of staff members' or citizens' efforts. Work into every local speech the impact of the school district on the quality of life in the community.
8. Out of town—check on especially sensitive topics, strongly held beliefs and attitudes and recent local events that relate to the speaker's topic.

Developing Resources For Speech Writing

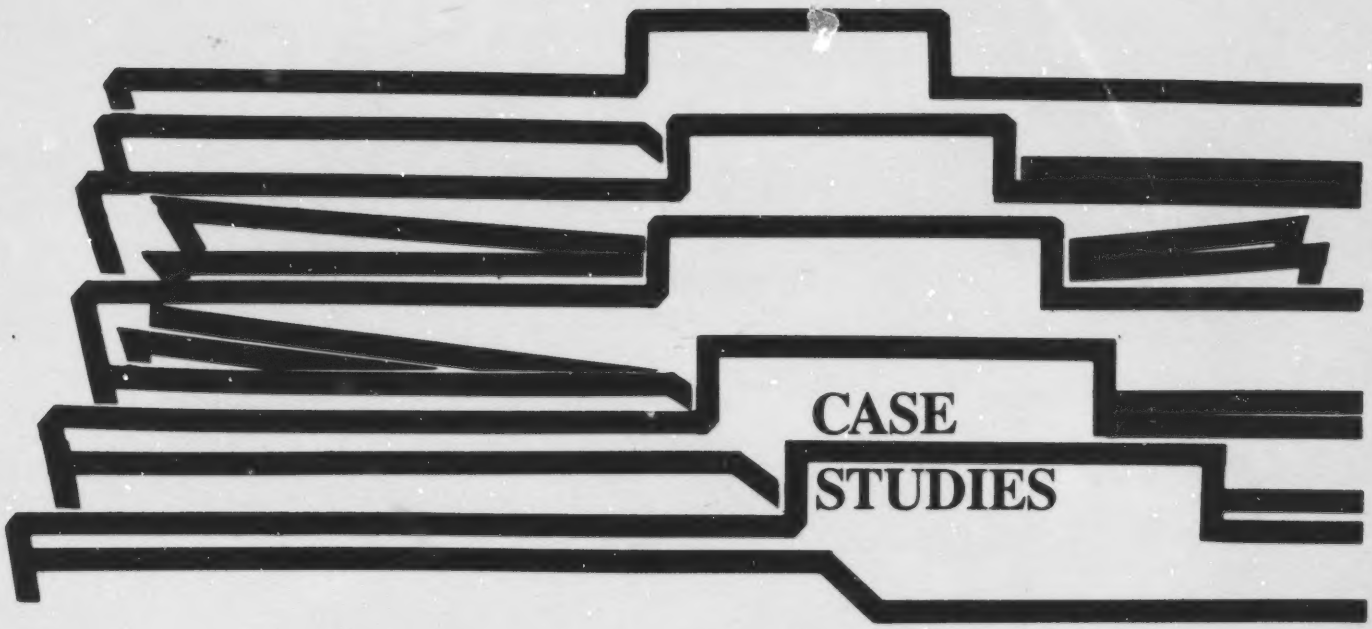
1. Keep a file on major educational topics and issues such as declining enrollment and competency testing from educational journals, news clippings, etc. Take national statistics and localize.
2. Develop a topical file of anecdotes, quotes, examples, etc. Take the best from collections, clip stories from the newspaper, jot down jokes and anecdotes from speakers, TV, etc.
3. Develop a file of colorful phrases.

Getting Ready To Write

1. Keep in mind the difference between oral and written speech.
   - Somewhere between conversational and article style
   - More words to say idea than to write it, more repetition
   - Thought units relatively short although grammatical units may be longer
   - Simpler words
   - Difference in rhythm—more contractions in spoken form. Read speech aloud to yourself.
2. Make it personal. Speak of an individual rather than people in general. Localize impact. Tell how something will help YOU.
3. Appeal to the five senses.
4. Use humor—but use it judiciously.
   - Creates interest and attention
   - Should be relevant
   - Should help make a point rather than interrupt train of thought
   - Should be in good taste
   - Should be fresh—humor related to the occasion is excellent.
   - Use a real-life situation or tell it as a real-life situation.
5. Lace the speech with case histories, illustrative anecdotes, analogies and comparisons.
6. Use attention-getting gimmicks, such as making each point start with the same letter—"the five x's of motivation."
7. Use visual material with care.
   - Should be used only when it will definitely enhance what the speaker is saying
   - May be used effectively for variety
   - Must be easily seen and read by the audience
   - Usually cannot be used effectively with a large group
   - Chancy at a distance unless you can personally check out the room and make arrangements
8. Pick the brains of experts in the field and get them to check your draft if the subject is highly technical.

Writing The Speech

1. Use attention-getting device in introduction.
   - Startling statement
   - Humor that makes a point and sets the stage
   - Children's story
   - Anecdote
   - Analogy that can be woven in and out of speech and returned to as a clincher at the very end
   - Question that places listener vicariously in a certain situation
2. Develop a purpose statement that tells the listener what will be gained from hearing this speech.
3. Use three to five main points in the speech. Help the listener by numbering them—"first of all," "the second point I would like to make," etc.
4. State in the conclusion what you want the listeners to take away with them.
   - Rephrase the statement of purpose.
   - Summarize briefly the main points of the speech.
   - Give the audience a challenge, a plan of action, specific things they can do, when apropos.
   - End with a reference back to the introduction.


CASE
STUDIES

Principals/Teachers As Communicators
Alief Independent School District

Statement of Problem

Once a sparsely populated farming and ranching area, Alief has developed into a dynamic suburban community of 115,000 within the last two decades. School district enrollment increased from 400 students in 1964 to more than 19,000 in 1983. Projections place the 1987-88 student body at 27,556.

The need for a strong district-community communications program grew at the same pace. Thus, the problem became: How can the district communicate most effectively with the citizens it serves under rapid growth conditions?

The Distict

Alief Independent School District covers 36.6 square miles in southwest Harris County. School campuses have increased from two buildings in 1964 to 12 elementary, five middle, and two high schools— each with a north house and a south house—in 1983. A third high school and a sixth middle school are now in the planning stage.

The district tax base is solid, combining industrial, commercial, and residential property. Its rating by the leading bond houses in New York now stands at AA. Tax revenue in 1982 totaled $4,080,340,530.

Process Used

Effective communication was an integral part of the Management by Objectives program developed several years ago. As a part of Alief's annual end-of-the-year evaluation, each staff member is asked to suggest new ideas or improvements for the coming year. These suggestions are forwarded to the district superintendent.

Goal No. 7 in the Management by Objectives booklet published in 1976-77 deals with communication:

Goal:

To further enhance the positive image of the schools and school district in the minds of the citizens of the community.

Objective:

The citizens of the community will have a better understanding of the purpose and operation of the school system.

Plan:

1. More citizens advisory committees will be utilized in various phases of the operation of the schools.
2. Parents will be given a variety of opportunities to participate in school activities, and strong efforts will be exerted to encourage them to participate.
3. Inservice programs will be conducted for employees within the district so that the employees may more effectively explain the purposes and operation of the schools to the public.
4. A public awareness program will be developed "to get the word to the people." Such a program could include:
   - School and School District Newsletters
   - Speakers Bureau
   - Businessmen Visitation Day
   - Eat Lunch At School Day
   - Senior Citizens Day
   - Topical Slide-Tape Presentations
   - School Open House
   - Brochures and Knowledge Cards

Other MBO items that stressed communications with parents include:

1. Conferences will be held among teachers and with the parents of each student who is ex-

Alief Independent School District
A Report from the Office
of the Superintendent
March, 1983
Communicator

ALIEF ISD SCHOOL BUS
P. O. Box 68
Alief, Texas 77411

periencing difficulty with his/her development of a positive self-image to evaluate the self-image of the student, any noted improvement, and to explore other methods which may be utilized to further enhance the self-image of the child.

2. Channels of communication will be established and improved between employees and between groups of employees to enhance the understanding, concerns and relationships.

3. Parent-teacher conferences will be conducted regularly to share in the understanding of the progress of the student in mastering the basic skills, and methods will be determined by the teacher and the parents to improve progress whenever possible.

4. Efforts will be made to explain the grading system to parents, and parents will better understand the meaning and purpose of the grading system.

5. A significant percentage of parents and children in the Alief ISD schools will feel well satisfied as to the adequacy of the information received regarding the performance of their children.

6. Each secondary teacher will have at least 10 parent conferences each semester.

7. Telephone conferences and/or personal notes will be used by the teachers to report to parents problems encountered with their children and more importantly to report on the accomplishments, achievements, and successes of the children.

Thus, the framework was set. Each year district staff members helped to formulate the goals and objectives dealing with communication. Once the MBO models were completed, the Alief ISD Board of Education and the district superintendent told all principals and other administrators to continue strengthening the two-way channels of communication. Principals were asked to focus their efforts on the specific needs of their own schools and the parents and other citizens in their neighborhoods.

Although each principal was able to individualize his or her own program, the similarities in carrying out the communications process were striking. While the MBO plan is no longer officially in use, administrators have continued to develop and refine the communications program.

Strategy

The strongest element of the Alief ISD communications program involves principals and teachers as "key communicators" for the district. The main objective is to communicate with their immediate communities—to give information and to listen to what the community has to say. All communications strategies begin in the principals' meetings.

Principals at all levels meet twice each month with their assistant superintendents to review the quality of instruction and other matters of concern. Here, each principal is able to identify different ways to speak and listen to their publics. Sections of the Alief Instructional Model are discussed and principals plan sepcific techniques necessary to model what they learn for their teachers.

The following description pinpoints the communications role of the teacher.

> Most people recognize that the teacher has potential power far exceeding that of any other factor—teachers really do make the big difference in learning. The key for making important learning differences is in the professional decisions teachers must make literally thousands of times each day. Our goal in Alief is to help teachers to make better decisions and, consequently, improve instruction and increase the chances for greater learning.
>
> The method chosen to help teachers centers around the building principals and is called the Alief Instructional Model. (AIM) The principal is central to teacher and learning improvement by virtue of his/her responsibility as the instructional leader for the school.
>
> The Alief Instructional Model is designed to help principals help teachers make better decisions in three areas: lesson design, principles of learning, and curriculum use.

Specific areas that may be covered in a meeting of principals and then transferred to the teachers include:

1. Classroom Instruction—If a child is learning, he or she is usually communicating a positive message to parents.
2. Conferencing—Principals model conferencing techniques for teachers. Alief has built methods of getting feedback into the conferencing system. Progress reports are sent home at three- and six-weeks intervals. The report card, a summative evaluation, provides additional information. Also, each teacher is responsible for writing a short note to the parents about each child's progress.
3. Telephone—Every staff member is required to return phone calls as quickly as possible.
4. Calendars—Most calendars of school events are published in campus newsletters which are sent home to parents.
5. "Pat on the Back" Notes—Teachers are encouraged to send home positive notes when children are doing well.
6. Good News Travels Fast—The district superintendent sends special messages home to children who are doing especially well. The recipients are determined by the principals.
7. Conference Days—Elementary schools have set aside two days each school year to visit with parents in the building. School is dismissed at noon and the rest of the day is given over to the conferences.
8. Congratulatory Notes—Principals and teachers write notes to parents congratulating them on their children's progress.
9. Co-curricular Activities—Festivals, open houses, pod nights, and other co-curricular activities are discussed in the principals' meetings. Demonstration of student progress in the school provides an excellent vehicle for communication.
10. Board Recognition—Certificates are presented to students who have excelled in a specific area. Principals determine who will be honored.
11. Handbooks—Principals oversee development of parent handbooks in the elementary schools and student handbooks in the secondary schools.
12. Special Phone Calls—Teacher calls to express concern whenever a student is absent. These calls, much appreciated by parents, demonstrate the district's concern for each child.

Although principals and teachers are the key communicators for their campuses and the district as a whole, they do need support. This assistance is provided by the Public Information Office. Here are a few ways in which the information staff helps coordinate the overall communication effort:

1. Public Information Council—One staff member from each school is a member of the district Public Information Council, responsible for providing news tips or ideas to the PIO. Based on these ideas and supporting information, the information office sends news releases to the local media.
2. Photos—The PIO takes photos of special school events for release to local suburban newspapers and for use in other publications.
3. Special Events—The PIO, based on information provided by the principals, contacts news media concerning coverage of special events.
4. Graphics—The PIO helps teachers, principals, and others with publications graphics and layout problems.
5. Speakers Bureau—A list of volunteers from the community is available to teachers and principals. The community members may have special talents or knowledge which will bring greater understanding to a particular classroom subject.

Renovation Project Bond Issue
Crockett County Consolidated Common School District

Statement of Problem

The district needed additional space to provide facilities for art, computer science, speech, auto mechanics, remedial and other special education programs, along with future development of adult education and classes in cosmetology. The board of trustees, working with the district administration, decided to renovate a 65-year-old junior high building that had been vacant for two years. The communications problem became: Convince the voters this was the correct approach.

The District

Crockett County Consolidated Common School District is located in Ozona, an unincorporated West Texas community of 4,000 people on Interstate 10 approximately 85 miles southwest of San Angelo. Ozona is the county seat of an area that has traditionally been ranching country. Now, however, oil and gas production are drawing a number of new families to the area.

The school district operates four campuses: Ozona Primary (K-2), Ozona Intermediate (3-5), Ozona Middle School (6-8), and Ozona High school (9-12). It has an average daily attendance of approximately 1,000 students.

Specific Concerns

The old Ozona Junior High, originally a high school when constructed in 1910, had been empty for two years. The old building had been replaced by a new junior high in 1981. Since then, members of the Crockett County Historical Society, fearing vandalism and other deterioration, had discussed their concerns with the board of trustees and the superintendent.

Still rock solid after more than 70 years, the building had been granted a Texas Historical Marker in 1967. Three factors led to the decision to renovate the three-story masonry structure: (1) The building was still basically in good condition. (2) Renovation would be more cost-effective than new construction. (3) The old school had considerable historic importance in the community.

Strategy

The superintendent, following approval by the board of trustees, planned a communications effort that would reach all citizens in the area served by the Ozona public schools.

During the weeks immediately preceding the bond issue, he met first with members of the historical society to assure them the best possible use would be made of the building as soon as the renovation could be completed. He also described the detailed plans, including updating of heating, cooling, lighting, flooring, dropped ceilings, and other improvements.

Detailed plans were also presented to the Women's League, civic groups, and other interested citizens, both in person and through news stories and interviews carried by the local weekly newspaper and radio station. Two pamphlets outlining basic facts were developed and presented to voters at the civic meetings.

The superintendent made a continuing effort to make sure all board members were provided with current information and any changes in the building plans so they could respond to questions from groups or individual citizens.

Results

The $1.5 million bond issue held on April 19, 1983, passed 234-13. Bonds were then sold via competitive bid to the Ozona National Bank at 6.78 percent interest over a seven-year period.

Renovation began in October 1983 with completion scheduled for August 1984, in time for use during the full 1984-85 school year.

Dallas Adopt-A-School Program
Dallas Independent School District

Statement of Problem

The Dallas schools started exploring the Adopt-A-School concept in the mid-70's when the number of school volunteers began declining because of new work opportunities for women and growing gasoline shortages. The goal was to increase the number of school volunteers by identifying and recruiting from new sources. Businesses, agencies, and other community groups and organizations were obviously key targets for such an effort.

The District

The Dallas Independent School District includes nearly 200 schools, and some 130,000 students in an urban setting. The district's enrollment is majority minority as well as very diverse, ranging from pockets of high socio-economic students to inner-city settings with high percentages of poverty.

Specific Concerns

The district had been working with community groups for a number of years and was benefiting from such relationships through human and other resources for boys and girls as well as the PR value of community involvement. Because non-working volunteers were no longer available in great numbers, it was decided to appeal to institutions which had available people as well as resources.

Because of a long-standing relationship with the Dallas business community, chief executive officers became a target audience as well as leaders in key community groups and organizations. The major communication objective, of course, was to make these individuals aware of school needs and how they might specifically assist the district. The superintendent, public relations director, and the volunteer coordinator played key roles in the project.

Strategy planning sessions were conducted by the superintendent and public relations staff to determine the best approach after considering a number of options. Two options were studied in detail: A major all-out public relations campaign designed to appeal to the community at large, or a smaller pilot approach utilizing a person-to-person campaign.

The latter choice was chosen for two major reasons: (1) it was felt that the adopt-a-school effort should start out small to learn from mistakes and build upon successes, and (2) it was felt that key community leaders would be more interested if they were involved in development of the initial project rather than being included in a broad community-wide appeal.

Strategy

The communications staff worked with the Dallas Chamber of Commerce to determine key businesses and their chief executive officers who had been involved with the schools in the past. In addition, the staff also identified community organizations which had been supportive and involved. Finally, an effort was made through top school administrators to identify principals who would be open to piloting the concept.

The initial plan called for holding a series of breakfast and luncheon meetings over a period of six months. These sessions were conducted in the superintendent's conference room with no more than five or six business executives and community leaders invited at one time. The idea was to line up 20 to 25 successful adoptions during the first school year.

Other than the food served at the meetings with community leaders, no additional resources in excess of regular budget were required.

Results

The original strategy not only worked well, but

better than anticipated. Business and community leaders were excited about the concept and ready and willing to go to work. Many business leaders involved in the initial pilot phase volunteered to hold follow-up orientation sessions with peers and to promote the merits of the adopt-a-school concept. The real problem became finding schools that were receptive to the new idea. As a result, enthusiastic principals who had participated in the pilot projects were also used to sell the idea to their peers.

After the first year in which nearly 50 companies and organizations participated, it became obvious that the communications staff would have to reorganize and develop more specific implementation procedures for the adopt-a-school effort. An arrangement was made with the Dallas Chamber of Commerce to handle the initial contacts with businesses. The district's community relations staff was assigned to work with community agencies, groups, and organizations. A communication staff member would always be present at initial meetings involving adopting groups and school principals. Based upon project goals fashioned at these meetings, specific follow-up strategies were developed.

Over the years, the project has continued to grow. During 1982-83, more than 2,100 adopting groups were involved in 160 DISD schools.

The following basic steps are utilized in planning the district's programs.

Maintain Ongoing Assessment of Environment—Know your community, particularly the interests of the business community. Know your schools well, too, particularly their individual needs and what the business community might do to assist.

Officially Define Effort—Community partnerships won't get off the ground unless they are made a top priority. Establish board policy on your commitment. Insist that the administration spell out guidelines and procedures for staff. Note the importance of such efforts in your official goals statement.

Develop Marketing Strategy—Don't try to do it all overnight. Focus on a few workable activities. . . and build on successes. Ask businesses to help you in selling others. And always start at the top with the chief executive officer.

Establish A Care and Feeding System—The toughest part of the job is keeping it going. Such efforts can be a systematic maintenance system that includes assigning staff responsibilities, providing training for staff and citizens, recognizing and stroking partners and operating a tracking (evaluation) system.

Build A Support System—The effort won't go on forever unless you make it a tradition. Work with regular community and parent groups, as well as new ones you can identify, to build a self-renewing mechanism for your partnership effort.

Design A Communications Plan—A comprehensive effort must be made to inform key publics about the workings as well as the importance of partnerships. Include items in all your ongoing publications. Use appropriate audiovisual presentations. Prepare necessary printed materials. Include the topic in your speakers bureau.

Encourage Vertical/Horizontal Staff Coordination—Partnerships don't belong to one department, program or school. They help everyone, so everyone has to be involved in selling them and making them work. Build in staff cooperation at all levels.

Tie in to Overall PR Effort—Remember the public relations value of involvement. Use partnerships to transmit information about and to obtain feedback on overall school programs, plans, progress and problems.

Evaluation

Each year the effort is evaluated in several ways. Quantitative measures are conducted through extensive records kept on the number of individuals involved, time contributed, as well as

actual resources donated. A variety of reporting forms which ultimately are fed into a computer profile of the effort are utilized.

In addition, both adopters and school staff are involved in an ongoing evaluation process. Each project is reviewed at the end of the first or second six weeks, as well as at mid-year by the Dallas Chamber of Commerce and/or community relations staff of the district. A year-end assessment is completed by both school staff and the participating community group. Each is asked to submit candid opinions of the experience, including suggestions for improvement. These reports are used in making mid-point ad justments, or plans for the ensuing year.

Closing Comment

The adopt-a-school concept is one of those rare opportunities that provides something for everybody. It obviously helps boys and girls through the contribution of human and financial resources. It helps businesses and community groups in a variety of ways. And, from a school PR practitioner's point of view, there isn't a better way to build community support as well as develop new communication vehicles. It's a lot of hard work, but well worth the effort.

Rapid Suburban Growth Bond Election
Fort Bend Independent School District

Statement of Problem

Explosive industrial and commercial development is generating almost unprecedented population growth in southwest Houston and the surrounding suburbs. The increase in the number of public school students, of course, parallels this growth.

The Fort Bend Independent School District provides an almost laboratory-perfect example of rapid population growth and the resulting impact on a medium-size system.

District enrollment more than doubled during the past eight years, from 13,251 students in 1976 to 28,105 in 1984. The newest business projections forecast a second doubling of the population within the next six years. Should this trend continue, newcomers to northeast Fort Bend County will literally force-feed the district into becoming one of the largest school systems in the Houston-Galveston area by 1990.

The impact is evident and can be defined quite simply: Year after year, the district must hire more staff and build more buildings. This case study is concerned with the buildings—and the 1982 bond election necessary to finance their construction.

The District

Students living within the 174-square mile Fort Bend ISD attend class in 13 elementary schools, four junior high schools, three high schools, a career school, and a special education school. They are served by 2,300 staff members, including 1,141 teachers.

The district is located in northeast Fort Bend County immediately southwest of Houston. It includes the incorporated cities of Sugar Land, Missouri City, Arcola, a small portion of southwest Houston, and the smaller communities of Clodine, DeWalt, and Fresno.

Area population, represented by a number of ethnic groups, includes 61 percent Anglo families, 19 percent Black, 15 percent Hispanic, and five percent Oriental or other.

Despite the rapid influx of new industrial plants and the supporting shopping areas and real estate developments, Fort Bend is not a wealthy district. Average family income, for example, is estimated at $27,692 per year. While the statewide average tax base totals $153,000 per student throughout the 1,100 districts in Texas, the Fort Bend tax base is currently $123,000 per student.

Analysis of Problem

Although the district did not conduct a formal opinion survey, previous informal reaction from parent groups, community leaders, and advisory committees indicated strong voter support to maintain the quality and reputation of Fort Bend schools. However, trustees and district administrators believed any bond election timed to coincide with an increase in property valuations might be jeopardized. Therefore, the decision was made to hold the election at least six months prior to any re-valuation of property.

For this reason, the board of trustees decided to schedule the bond election as early as possible in the 1982-83 school year: September 25, 1982. This decision created one major problem, however. That is, all planning would have to be completed during the summer when school was not in session and many key staff members and other citizens would be on vacation.

Process Used

Planning, which was focused in the school/community relations office, was completed by late August. As a result of the intensive summer work, the kick-off rally sponsored by the East

Fort Bend Chamber of Commerce on August 28 turned out the largest crowd in the chamber's history. Another series of meetings was held in neighborhoods throughout the Fort Bend ISD area in September.

A citizens committee appointed by the board of trustees worked with the district administrators in planning for the bond election and in communicating its need and purpose to the voters. This grassroots effort also included a steering committee of key administrators and members of district advisory groups who served as a steering committee. This committee approved all campaign materials, planned strategy, and coordinated the work of other volunteers who worked in the neighborhoods.

The Citizens Bond Advisory Committee included 25 business, community, and civic leaders who planned overall election strategy and solicited private funds to support the campaign effort.

One administrator (principal) in each school building served as the local neighborhood chairman to help recruit volunteers, organize coffee and telephone committees, and supervise distribution of campaign materials. Here, the PTA and PTO memberships provided tremendous assistance.

Board members, other citizens, and district staff working in the bond election effort developed an overall positive theme keyed to building on growth while retaining the current pride in the Fort Bend school system. This theme was presented to the voters in a number of ways:

(1) Campaign Media:

- Basic brochure mailed to each resident of the district
- A 12-minute slide/tape production illustrating current crowded conditions and proposed building sites.
- Fliers highlighting needs and costs distributed through schools, realtors, chamber of commerce, civic associations, individual businessees and industries.
- Special mailers to district employees.
- Posters—schools and store windows.
- Telephone calls by volunteers.
- Neighborhood coffee sessions with board members and district administrators present to respond to questions.

(2) Audiences:

- Parent/teacher groups
- Chamber of commerce
- Civic and service clubs
- Church organizations
- School volunteer groups
- Realtors
- District/campus faculty and staffs
- Booster clubs (band and football)
- Senior citizen groups

(3) Meeting Schedule

May 10—Met with board of trustees to approve strategies.

May 13—At regularly scheduled meeting of Superintendent's Council, made dates for PTA/PTO calendar for early September presentations.

May 17—Met with board of trustees to develop voter profile questionnaire based on suggestions from the Citizens Bond Advisory Committee.

June 14—District school-community relations office issued its first press release outlining projected growth and the necessary construction plans. Staff members provided background information and board and staff members for interviews. All coverage was local, focused largely in three community newspapers.

July 1—A series of meetings designed to make continuing adjustments and provide updated progress reports was held through September 24. District staff members, in-

cluding school principals, and citizen committee members were involved.

August 1—Civic and other groups were contacted with offers of informed speakers from the board and staff who could discuss the pending bond election in specific detail. Many were accepted.

August 9—District issued a press release on "Bond Referendum 1982."

August 23—District issued press release on "Board Calls for Schoolhouse Bond Referendum" and photos of Citizens Bond Advisory Committee and Board members.

Individual panels, each of which included one Board member, one advisory committee member, and one district administrator, presented discussion session meetings throughout the area. These sessions also included the slide/tape presentation followed by a question-and-answer discussion.

Another 50 programs involving PTA/PTO organizations, school principals, members of the communications committee, and the chamber of commerce were presented in school buildings in an effort to bring the facts to the neighborhoods.

Members of the school/community relations staff made a detailed study of past record voter trends in city, county, and school district elections in order to spot trends among the different constituencies. Based on these records compiled over a seven-year period, the staff could pinpoint the major concerns and project possible trends. Voters surveyed included those with children, senior citizens, families who had been residents over a long period, and families new to the district. Background information was provided largely by files of newspaper reports.

During this period, also, letters soliciting funds to finance the election were sent to major developers and other business firms, including banks, architectural firms, and major corporations responsible for the high employment and resulting growth rate. Fifteen firms responded with the funds necessary to provide the budget. The funds, set up in a separate bank account controlled by the treasurer of the Citizens Bond Advisory Committee, were adequate to support an effective campaign.

Evaluation

The plan worked as expected, resulting in a six-to-one voter approval of the $50 million bond issue. The funds are being spent as follows:

*Construction of Phase II of Willowridge High School	$5,500,000
*Construction of two elementary schools and purchase of the sites in Sugar Mill and in First Colony	6,600,000
*Construction of two elementary schools and the purchase of their sites in the Hunters Glen and Lake Olympia areas	7,300,000
*Construction of high school number four west of Sugar Land along FM 1464	19,700,000
*Construction of junior high school number five, in the First Colony area	10,900,000
	$50,000,000

Community School Communication
Frisco Independent School District

Statement of Problem

To improve communications with trustees, teachers, students, parents, and citizens of the Frisco community.

The District

- 974 Average Daily Attendance
- Rural/15 miles from Dallas
- Socio-economic ranges from very poor families to very wealthy families/in most homes both parents work/many commute to Dallas area.
  Anglo (69%), Hispanic (23%), Black (8%)
- Assessed valuation is $206,674,044 for 1983-84

Analysis of Problem

A real need to improve communications with all groups mentioned above was noticed in 1978. These groups needed to better understand the educational programs of the district. The superintendent has assumed responsibility for involving trustees and many school personnel in improving communications.

Process Used

No formal meetings to discuss a communications effort have been held. It was done in regularly scheduled meetings of the trustees, administrators, and teachers. The need for improved communications was discussed and a commitment was made to achieve this desirable objective.

The options selected are listed below:

1. Newspaper articles—all personnel are encouraged to submit news realeases to the local weekly newspaper and newspapers in surrounding cities concerning program improvements, activities, etc. This results in many published articles.
2. A *District Digest* was started and is sent to school personnel, trustees, senior citizens, and selected patrons. It is published four to six times a year.
3. A list of annual achievements was first published in 1981 to highlight the major accomplishments of the district and its students.
4. Two brochures that summarize the programs and opportunities offered by the district have been distributed to the publics previously listed. Complimentary copies are available to real estate firms, businesses, the chamber of commerce, and other groups.
5. Specific program brochures are often developed to better explain important components.
6. Handbooks that explain the programs, graduation requirements, course descriptions, rules and regulations, etc., are now published in each secondary school. This greatly increases understanding of individual schools.
7. School newspapers and periodic letters from principals to parents are used to inform parents and students about individual school programs and scheduled events.
8. Informative professional journal articles are often reproduced and sent to trustees and/or appropriate personnel to keep them informed about educational issues and program improvements.
9. Each school now has a Faculty Advisory Committee that meets monthly with the principal to discuss procedures, program im-

provement, etc. Members are primarily elected by the entire faculty and each person is requested to make suggestions to this small group. An agenda is used.

10. A district-wide Faculty Advisory Committee of three elected teachers from each campus meets monthly with the superintendent to discuss procedures, program improvement, and other topics. An agenda is used.
11. Appropriate personnel make periodic reports to trustees concerning specific programs. This process offers an opportunity for interchange between staff members and trustees.
12. A slide presentation illustrating district programs is used to better communicate with civic groups and parents.
13. Some key personnel address civic groups, PTA, and booster clubs to provide opportunities for direct interchange with patrons.
14. Volunteers work in classrooms, libraries, and clinics in all three schools, thus increasing public awareness of school programs. These volunteers then communicate with other people.
15. An activity sign was placed on Main Street to highlight school events and accomplishments.
16. A Polaroid camera was purchased so instant pictures can be taken to accompany news releases.
17. A Senior Citizen Gold Card Club enables people 65 years of age or older to attend most events free of charge. An annual Christmas dinner is well attended during the school day. Members receive the *District Digest*. A real effort is made to keep this group of supporters informed and involved in school activities.

Strategy

An effort is made to insure that all personnel know the importance of their role in school communications. No time-lines have been developed. The program has just evolved because of a commitment to improve communications. The only resources used are nominal amounts for printing and the time of those involved. No additional personnel have been assigned to this effort.

Results

Communications have been improved and only good results have been observed. Refinements and improvements in the program are constantly being made.

Evaluation

Informal evaluation of the communications program reveals that it is successful. However, despite all efforts, there are people who are not informed about the programs and additional effort must be made to reach them.

Internal Communications Plan
Garland Independent School District

Statement of Problem

Internal communications is a consistently "weak link" in the overall information effort of major corporations, government agencies, private agencies and business of almost every type—and school districts. The lack of an organized internal communications program is, in other words, more pervasive than unique. Yet, it is the staff members of any organization who transmit its goals, objectives, even its personality to the many publics it serves.

Garland Independent School District several years ago recognized the contributions its staff could make toward developing strong community support. With that idea in mind, the district made internal communications a top management priority. At the same time, it continued a strong external communications program. As a result, the need to keep both the staff and the public informed developed into a broad-based effort in year-round communications.

The result: mutual understanding.

The District

Nearly 3,000 district staff members serve a population of more than 37,000 students. Located northeast of Dallas, Garland ISD draws its students from three cities: Garland, Rowlett, and Sachse. The latest census data indicate the 103-square-mile district in located in one of this state's fastest growing areas. The communities are all socially and economically balanced.

Analysis of Problem

A real need to improve communications with all groups mentioned above was noticed in 1978. These groups needed to better understand the educational programs of the district. The superintendent has assumed responsibility for involving trustees and many school personnel in improving communications.

Strategy

The need to strengthen internal communications among all staff members became a major Garland ISD goal for the following reasons:

1. A growing awareness of the difficulties involved in communicating correct information to all employees.
2. The increased complexity of the school operation that seems to build inadvertent communications barriers among employees.
3. An increased desire by the school board and administration to establish a truly two-way communications system.

Process Used

The plan focuses on the communications needs of some 3,000 professional and support staff members who work in 57 facilities scattered throughout the district. The numbers, both in people and in miles traveled, led the administration to concentrate primarily on printed pieces distributed at regular intervals. The "personal touch" efforts include luncheons, breakfast sessions, special event banquets, seminars, and informal get-togethers.

Involvement begins with the school board whose members regularly attend campus and district functions throughout the year to become better acquainted with staff members. The central administrative staff also works to maintain an "open door" policy and to assist employees whenever the need arises.

The specific printed communications projects include the following:

ClipBoard Notes—A summary of action taken at each school board meeting is printed and sent to all employees the morning after the session.

Staff Update—An internal newsletter is

disseminated regularly and contains feature stories on employees, programs, educational news, professional accomplishments, and legal/legislative updates.

District Dialogue—In this question and answer publication the superintendent of schools candidly responds to questions submitted by employees. Individuals have the option of submitting written queries anonymously, or bringing up concerns at periodic cluster breakfasts with the superintendent.

Summer Letters to Employees—Included in employees' July paychecks are letters advising them of August plans for staff development and other relevant back-to-school information.

School Calendars—As soon as the Board annually approves the calendar for the next school year, all employees receive an 8½ x 11 calendar. In addition, a billfold-size version is sent out with July paychecks to present employees. Calendars are also included in new employees packets.

Paycheck Messages—special messages are printed on monthly paycheck stubs. They include information on insurance, special dates, TB screening for employees, or voting.

Emergency Closing of Schools Information—All employees receive a contingency plan relevant to the closing of schools in case of inclement weather or emergency.

Leave Policy Brochure—All staff members are given a brochure that explains school board leave policy. The publication also provides answers to the leave-related questions that are most frequently asked of the Personnel Department.

Brochure on District-wide Goals—Employees as well as patrons have received copies of a leaflet that details the student learner and management goals adopted by the school board for the district.

Special Publications Recognizing Teachers—To let teachers know that they are appreciated, a booklet containing interviews with students about their most memorable teachers was produced.

Datebook—During 1983 staff development, each teacher was given a GISD datebook that contains a monthly planning calendar for the school year. The datebooks were printed and distributed to the teachers as a small "thank-you" for the endless hours that they spend workig with children.

The annual "personal touch" functions include:

New Teacher Workshop/Luncheon—To welcome and to orient teachers who are new to the system, a new teacher workshop/luncheon is held prior to August staff development. The assistant superintendent for personnel conducts a seminar on personnel services; consultants provide much needed curriculum information; the superintendent and school board give a luncheon after the workshop to honor the new teachers. In addition, the principals from the new teachers' schools are invited to the luncheon to meet with their new staff members. A large packet containing helpful information is presented to each new teacher.

Cluster Breakfasts—At regular intervals during the school year, the superintendent and assistant superintendents meet for breakfast with two different groups—teachers and principals.

Special Luncheons—Once a week, the superintendent invites a teacher and principal to lunch.

Retirement Banquet—At the end of each school year, an appreciation dinner and special program are held at an area country club to honor retiring employees. School board members are the evening's hosts and prepare short speeches about the individual retirees.

Employee Barbecue—All staff members and their guests are invited to a May barbecue. Part of the evening's activities include announcing the "teacher of the year" and the "employee of the year" and the other finalists for each award. These persons are selected by their colleagues. Service pins are presented at separate building-level faculty meetings.

Special Workshops/Seminars—Throughout the year, the central office plans workshops that are tailored to the needs of individual employee groups. Recent seminars have included computer training, investment opportunities, teaching strategies, and stress management.

Evaluation

Communications is serious business in Garland—so much so that it is part of the Five Year Accreditation Plan. Consequently, projects are monitored and evaluated yearly. The Communications department recently surveyed classroom teachers to determine if the internal communications program was meeting their needs. Of the 18 activities/projects listed, 13 were positively perceived by a majority of the individuals responding. From the survey, the department learned that teachers preferred most the communications efforts that keep them informed about the "essentials" of the district's operations. Therefore, the department has placed greater emphasis on materials and projects that give "nuts and bolts" information.

One of the best ways to build credibility and a tradition of educational excellence is to have employees who staunchly support the school system in which they work. For them to feel truly dedicated to their jobs and to their district, they must be informed. An effective internal communications program is the only viable way to accomplish this objective and thus maintain a strong school system where employees are solid in their commitments to children and to one another.

Volunteers in Public Schools
Houston Independent School District

Statement of Problem

In 1970, a number of different forces impacting on the Houston Independent School District created a need for increased involvement of parents and other members of the community. These forces included: school integration, the need to improve education for the disadvantaged and the handicapped, and the increased role of the federal government.

The district administration feels an increasing need for developing a partnership between HISD and the community it serves.

The District

The Houston Independent School District underwent dramatic change during the 1970-1983 period. Examples include: Enrollment decrease from 241,138 students with a 66 percent Anglo enrollment to 194,439 students with a 25 percent Anglo enrollment; budget increase from $31.4 million per year to $493.2 million; federal funds increase from $4.1 million per year to nearly $32 million. At the same time, the number of two-paycheck families increased from 20 percent to 70 percent.

Process Used

The district gathered materials from other cities with school volunteer programs in place. Members of the Junior League of Houston developed a planning committee that included representatives from the district and a number of community leaders. This committee presented its plan to the Board of Education in April 1970.

The Board approved a new department, Volunteers in Public Schools. A director was named and the office established in the district's central administration building.

The Houston Chamber of Commerce, which continues to support the program, helped generate support from other organizations. Representatives from 24 other community organizations, including the Houston Council of the PTA, served on the first VIPS board of directors. This board still holds the major responsibility for planning, recruiting, training, services, and materials.

Houston Independent School District assumed financial responsibility for staff salaries, office space and equipment, telephone, and basic materials. In 1970, the new office received a $45,000 grant from the Houston Endowment Foundation, Inc., to be used to promote the program and buy additional materials. Additional contributions made through the years have been deposited and controlled through regular district accounting procedures.

In 1974, a field coordinator and a recruitment coordinator were added to the VIPS staff in response to a call to support ongoing programs and to increase the number of volunteers. The original nucleus had now expanded into a new Department of Volunteer Services.

Principals of 29 schools volunteered to pilot the new program during the 1970 fall semester. By the end of the 1971-72 school year, the fledgling plan for involving community members directly in the schools was underway on more than 100 campuses across the city.

Campus level VIPS programs are designed to meet the needs of the individual schools. The principal appoints a school volunteer coordinator who is then trained by the staff and other experienced volunteers in how to assess campus needs, recruit volunteers from the neighborhood, keep records, and retain capable volunteers. The coordinator, who may be a parent in the elementary schools or a staff member in the secondary schools, is an important liaison working with the principal, teachers, and volunteers.

A quarterly newsletter, the *VIPS VOICE,* published its first edition in 1970 and continues to serve all volunteers. The publication, mailed to each volunteer's residence, carries news of meetings, workshops, individual programs, and outstanding accomplishments of individual parents and other citizens working in the schools.

Strategy

The first, and still largest, VIPS project was the annual Kindergarten Screening Program. Volunteers conducted the pilot project in May 1970 on nine elementary campuses. Working under the direction of the Junior League of Houston, more than 2,000 volunteers screened approximately 14,000 children for language-learning skills, eye-hand coordination, gross motor abilities, distant vision, and hearing.

Today, the 13-year-old project is one of the volunteer program's most effective recruiting techniques. Parents and non-parents involved on the teams continue to volunteer their services to the schools. Non-parents, particularly, have shown a continuing interest in the program once they have served as volunteers for the kindergarten screening. In 1982, for example, VIPS recruited non-parent teams of volunteers for 80 schools.

Additional VIPS efforts include:

Building Level Programs—School Volunteer Coordinators (SVC) appointed by the principal are trained by VIPS staff to assist in recruitment, building level orientation, placement and follow-up of parents and non-parents to assist in numerous programs. Primarily, VIPS trains volunteers to tutor children in reading, math, and bilingual studies. The largest groups work as classroom teacher assistants. Many are trained to assist in the Clinic, Library Media Center, Art Enrichment, Music, Mini-Gym, Micro-Computers and Special Education. The largest number of VIPS serve in this phase of the program.

Community Resource Bank (CRB)—Classroom speakers are scheduled at the teacher's request through the VIPS office. More than 2,000 businesses, organizations, universities and individuals are available to enrich the curriculum for students. Catalogs listing topics are provided to all secondary teachers, all school libraries and grade level chairpersons in all elementary schools.

VIPS-Seniors—This program, started in 1976 with a grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, recruits retired citizens to participate in all facets of VIPS. Of the 1,000 VIPS-Seniors who have served in all sections of the city, 40 percent are men. Each year more than 100 assist with kindergarten screening; 15 percent of the CRB presentations are made by Living Historians and retired business-persons; and 300 individuals contribute an average of four hours each week to the students of 140 schools.

Business/School Partnerships—This three-year-old program, supported by the Houston Chamber of Commerce, has recruited 67 companies that presently have 88 ongoing partnerships with 63 HISD schools. Emphasis has been on secondary magnet and Focus on Academic Achievement (FOAA) centers. The long range goal is to have every school in the district paired with a business. Businesses may provide people, funds, other resources and/or disseminate information but the emphasis is always on people. Employees may be released on company time to tutor, counsel, advise, speak, or enrich programs in other ways, while providing expertise, role models, and motiviation from the world of work. VIPS Business/School Partnerships is the NSVP 1983 first place national award winner for volunteer corporate involvement.

Special Education Volunteers—A staff person funded by Public Law 94-142 recruits, trains, and places volunteers to work with special children. Volunteers may work as tutors of children with learning problems in special "resource rooms," or may function as classroom aides with children who are mentally retarded, orthopedically handicapped, blind or partially sighted, deaf or hard of hearing, emotionally disturbed, or multiply

handicapped. Specialized volunteer programs include handicapped Scouting and Explorer Career Awareness, Special Olympics, *The Kids On The Block* (a troupe of handicapped puppets), a Special Education Speakers Bureau and a program of business involvement with secondary students concentrating on career planning.

Parents Calling Parents—A program to improve student attendance was initiated in HISD's Area IV and is being expanded districtwide. Volunteers made calls from the schools and their homes in an effort to improve basic skills by increasing student "time on task."

School After School—Delta Sigma Theta Sorority sponsors a basic skills tutorial program for students from schools near Hester House Community Center and 10 participating churches. The program has expanded to include services for ninth graders at Yates Senior High School. A grant from the Cullen Foundation will provide 12 computers to each of four church sites for use by students after school hours.

Evaluation

The VIPS continues to grow in the number of students served, range of individual topics covered, and depth of interest shown by the Houston community.

Individual citations from the National School Volunteer Program include: VIPS-Seniors national award in 1981, two Special Education national awards, and a first place national award for the Business/School Partnership Program.

How to Close A School
Alamo Heights Independent School District

Statement of Problem

The Alamo Heights Independent School District is physically locked into its traditional area by other districts serving the San Antonio area. By 1979, it had undergone a 10-year enrollment drop totaling 1,600 students.

In 1979 the district served its students in six schools: four elementary, one junior school, and one high school. Average daily attendance totaled 3,508 students.

The Board of Trustees faced one clear problem and asked the district administration for a plan to solve it. The problem: How can we improve the quality of education through more efficient use of district facilities? The solution lay in a careful analysis of the district, its patrons, its financial resources, and its probable future.

The District

Alamo Heights ISD is both small and suburban. Seventy-nine percent of its patrons may be classified as middle and upper income families, with a significant number of professional men and women. The remaining 21 percent fall into the low income bracket. The average patron has attended a college or university for more than two years. At the same time, however, about one-third of the homeowners in the district are over 65. Ethnic distribution includes 74 percent Anglo residents, 24 percent Mexican American, one percent Black, and one percent Oriental.

In 1983, the State Property Tax Board reported Alamo Heights ISD total assessed value at $1,050,650 or $374,786 per student.

Enrollment had peaked in 1967 with 5,168 students served by the six campuses. By 1979, this figure had dropped to 4,020 with the downside trend expected to continue through 1984 when enrollment would total just 2,931 students.

During this period, operating expenses at Robbins Elementary exceeded those of any other single campus in the district. Construction of an interstate highway through the Robbins attendance zone eliminated a number of homes in the area while the remaining property was turned to commercial use. Enrollment dropped 41 percent from 1973 to 1979.

Noting both the population trends and the need to make effective use of total resources, the district administration set out to answer a series of key questions:

(1) Should it close one school—or two?

(2) Which school or schools should be closed?

Members of the senior administration (superintendent, assistant superintendent, business manager, and curriculum director) set out to find the answers.

Strategy

They began with a house-to-house census of school-age and pre-school age children. Next, they compared these figures with the student capacity of each campus, exploring at least 230 possible methods of assigning students during the five-year period covered by the enrollment projection.

Then, the most feasible alternatives were studied in depth to assess the educational advantages and disadvantages. These studies included the effects on students, faculty, other staff members, and the traditional concept of the neighborhood or community school.

At the same time, the potential dollar savings of each possible alternative were analyzed in detail, keeping in mind the need to combine efficient school operation with improved quality of education. The resulting list of factors which would have a lasting impact on the district was

almost endless.

Data assembled for study by the district administrators included: ethnic distribution of students, transportation needs, effects on academic achievement, reallocation of staff members, changes in maintenance and other support services, potential effects on property values, zoning trends, possible morale problems, and community support.

Alamo Heights administrators discussed these problems with other top staff members from other districts which had experienced similar problems. Their findings? There were almost as many ways to close a school as there were schools which had closed.

Finally, the financial impact on Alamo Heights ISD itself focused on one key factor—how much money could be saved? The answer: Closing one school would cut operating expenses by $200,000 per year while closing an alternate would save $150,000.

At the same time, the property could be sold for approximately $2 million. The district tax base would be increased as well, yielding about $25,000 per year income. On the other hand, if the property were not sold, it would yield about $10,000 a month in net rental income.

A detailed analysis of all the tangibles and intangibles involved pointed to one decision: close one school. The question then became: which school could not be closed?

Once that question was answered, the school which could be closed remained. The superintendent recommended closing Robbins Elementary School to the district Board of Trustees at its October 1979 meeting. The reasons were presented to the trustees in detail.

(1) Robbins enrollment was decreasing more rapidly than had been projected and at a faster pace than other elementary schools.

(2) Student density in the surrounding attendance area was below that in other schools, especially in the lower grades.

(3) Zoning for commercial and light industrial land use was increasing at a rapid pace.

(4) Robbins land was more highly marketable than land occupied by other elementary schools.

(5) Robbins could accommodate a relatively small number of students.

(6) Some 52 percent of Robbins students qualified for free or reduced price meals, a ratio less conducive to academic achievement than a more balanced socio-economic environment.

(7) Maintenance and other support services were more expensive due to distance required for travel.

In his report, the superintendent also presented detailed enrollment projections for the three schools which would receive Robbins students, the ethnic makeup of each student body, and the anticipated annual net savings in school district funds.

All preliminary planning had been completed by the district administration before the October board meeting. Once the recommendation and supporting data were presented, the full community became involved.

Process Used

The recommendation to close Robbins Elementary School sparked a full month of intensive discussion among all citizens in Alamo Heights. Parent groups, civic clubs, church organizations, business leaders, women's clubs... all had questions and many had suggestions. The district trustees, superintendent, and other key administrators responded with facts, projections, and complete outlines of both pros and cons.

News coverage of meetings and background interview sessions was provided primarily by the North San Antonio Times, a suburban weekly. The newspaper, which is read by most residents of the area, carried a continuing series of news and feature stories on the school—and the effect its closing would have on the community. The large San Antonio dailies along with the major

television and radio stations gave little coverage to the highly localized story.

The board of trustees in November voted to close Robbins Elementary, a decision backed by solid community opinion. Now, a whole new type of citizen and staff involvement would get underway.

As soon as the board vote was confirmed, the superintendent issued a strong statement assuring all Robbins faculty and staff members that they would have jobs within the district. With this positive statement—and reaction—he was ready for the next step.

Robbins staff and faculty were asked to submit their first, second, and third choices as to grade level they would most like to teach, preferred school assignments, and other professional or support job preferences. Teaching assignments were to be made by mid-February 1980, with all school staffing to be completed by June 1.

Eight new ad hoc committees, each keyed to a particular area of citizen concern or technical need, were appointed to help carry out the school closing process. Their members included parents and other concerned citizens, school trustees, teachers, and administrators. The committees included:

Transition of Students, Faculty, and Parents—First meeting was held in early December 1979 with the final session on September 30, 1980. Co-chaired by two elementary school principals, the committee included parent-teacher organization presidents from four elementary and one junior school, district superintendent, district information officer, special services director, and parents.

Student Reassignment—First meeting set for December 5, 1979, and last held on January 30, 1980. The 20-member committee was chaired by the superintendent and included 19 other members of the school community, including parents, teachers, campus and district administrators.

Faculty and Staff Reassignment—First meeting held in early February 1980 with the last on February 29, 1980. The seven-member committee included all campus administrators involved.

Future Use of Robbins Facilities—First meeting was held in mid-December 1979. No final date has been set. Members include district trustees, residents of all attendance zones, district business manager, and district superintendent.

Bus Transportation—First meeting was set for March 1, 1980, with the final session held on May 1, 1980. The nine-member committee included parents, campus administrators, and was chaired by an assistant superintendent.

Furniture, Equipment, and Supplies—First meeting held March 1, 1980, and the last on May 31, 1980. The 12-member committee included representatives from each elementary school, all elementary principals, senior administrators, and was chaired by the curriculum director.

Disposition of Other Equipment—No timeline was set. The committee was chaired by the business manager and included four other district administrators.

Instructional Organization and Resources—Chaired by the curriculum director, the committee included elementary school principals and the director of special education.

The sequence of events leading to the final transition began in mid-February 1980 with parents, students, teachers, and administrators involved in a variety of get-acquainted efforts. All Robbins students were invited to their new schools for welcome parties hosted by teachers and students of the receiving units. Robbins teachers were also honored at receptions in their new schools. Parents were invited to a series of morning coffees held at the new schools their children would be attending.

The second step included a series of planning sessions for the coming year, each designed to involve the transferring faculty and staff members.

All Robbins equipment was transferred during the summer so teachers could be on hand to

personally oversee movement of their personal files and teaching materials. Teachers were paid for this time spent organizing, moving, and settling in.

Evaluation

As a result of the move, enrollment at each elementary school reached a level which could assure a comprehensive program with full support services. Operating costs were reduced, resulting in more effective use of tax dollars.

Additional revenue generated by a lease agreement involving the Robbins facilities provided further financial benefit to the district. Final reports submitted by the eight ad hoc committees provided a highly favorable evaluation of the decision and the methods used in carrying out the transition.

How to Build A New Communications Program
Kilgore Independent School District

Statement of Problem

All communications efforts, internal and external, were centered in the office of the superintendent. As a result of the steady growth in this effort, the superintendent saw a need for professional assistance to develop a comprehensive program.

The District

Kilgore Independent School District serves 3,259 students in average daily attendance drawn from a 107.6 square mile area. The district operates seven campuses, including one high school, one middle school, four elementary schools, and one special education school that serves multi-handicapped students. The conservative middle class community is supported primarily by the petroleum industry. About 20 percent of the district revenue comes from mineral properties.

Specific Concerns

Enhance the public image of the school district while assisting the superintendent in providing information to the local news media covering the board meetings and other school events.

Process Used

One of the first steps taken by the new public information officer focused on establishing a close working relationship with the daily newspaper and two radio stations serving the Kilgore area. This included a close study of their products, including writing style, topics, and deadlines.

The ways in which the district's information officer could be of help to reporters and editors was outlined in detail. As a result, the media and the information officer developed an effective working relationship based on respect and confidence.

Teachers and other district staff members were given first-hand briefings on the role of the information office—and of ways in which they could be of assistance to it. The information officer made as many personal contacts as possible to explain the new office. Brochures describing the information program and news guides were distributed throughout the district.

By the end of the first year, 2,000 copies of a new general district information brochure were distributed through the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce, area realtors, and the public information office itself. More than 100 news releases had been prepared and 36 radio shows produced.

Strategy

The district board of education approved the formation of a public relations standing committee that met periodically to determine program goals and evaluate efforts. A communication policy was drafted and presented to the full board for its approval. This policy provides the basis for complete development of the program.

Success built on success. Each new effort by the public information office seemed to generate a need for additional services. As a result of the response to the rather ad hoc development during the first year, the district undertook a truly comprehensive three-year development program based on a detailed study of needs. Major goals, and their early completed objectives, are described below:

(1) Improve Internal Communication:

- A first-time newsletter, the "Inside Special," is distributed to all staff and faculty. It includes professional and personal items.
- Splash Cards are sent to teachers and other staff members to recognize individual achievements.

- The "Headliner Project" encourages teachers and administrators to report newsworthy items—in time to be effective.

(2) Improve External Communication:

- A 12-minute slide/tape show highlighting district programs is available to local civic clubs and school-related organizations.
- The district newsletter, "Spotlight," is sent to approximately 3,500 Kilgore residents four times during the school year.
- Newcomers receive a copy of the general information brochure along with a letter of welcome from the district superintendent.
- A weekly five-minute radio news report taped by the public information office highlights school activities for local stations.
- Public service announcements are prepared for and aired by the two radio stations in Kilgore, as well as local cable television.
- A weekly newspaper column, the "KISD Report," summarizes major activities.
- News releases are prepared (100 during the first year) on major activities and programs.

(3) Encourage Public to Assume an Active Role in Education:

- A Gold Card Club encourages senior citizens to attend school activities free of charge.
- Student "pen pals" write letters to the senior citizens to keep them informed of programs and activities.
- School Volunteer program encourages parents and non-parents to present classroom programs and otherwise participate in district activities.

Evaluation

A recent survey drew the following results from respondents:

PI program is superior—25 percent

PI program is excellent—30 percent

PI program is good—45 percent

The public information coordinator was named "Rookie-of-the-Year" by the Texas School Public Relations Association in 1981.

Two communications projects have been awarded the TSPRA "Bright Idea" citation and eight publications have receive similar honors.

Partners in Education
North East Independent School District

Statement of Problem

The public information officer conducted a study in the NEISD community asking patrons to respond to various educational issues. Many parents indicated a desire to become more aware of activities in the schools. Demographic analysis also established that many students were from single-parent homes.

The NEISD superintendent responded to the parents' interest in the educational environment of their children by implementing the Partners in Education Program. The purpose of this program is:

(1) Improved student attitude, attendance, achievement, interest, and discipline

(2) Increased parent involvement along with positive parent-teacher-student relationships

The District

- Size—enrollment 34,000 and 41 campuses
- Type—suburban-urban
- Socio-economic makeup—mixed
- General wealth of district—assessed taxable valuation $3.5 billion (1982)

Analysis of Problem

(1) Specific concerns

- Create a supportive relationship between the home and school.
- Increase parent involvement in schools.
- Provide material for parents with suggestions and ideas for helping the child at home.
- Build a partnership between home and school in a noncrisis situation.

(2) Target audience(s)—parents of third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and ninth grade students.

(3) Communications needs

- Officially inform targeted parents.
- Generate interest and support by other district populations.
- Assess perceived needs, possible methods and strategies.
- Evaluate results.
- Plan methods and strategies with teachers involved.
- Report to Board of Trustees concerning program.
- Provide personal and social opportunities to expand interaction and understanding of parents and teachers.

(4) Communication personnel and staff involved, including board members

- Board of Trustees—approve program and appropriate funding
- Administrative Council—superintendent and all assistant superintendents
- PTA Council—district organization representing all PTA units
- Public Information Officer
- Counseling Coordination
- Academic Officers
- Steering Committee
- Coordinator of Partners in Education Program

Process Used

Preliminary planning to include meetings held, participation by staff and other volunteers.

A central office consultant was appointed to coordinate the program. A proposed plan of action was written and presented to the steering

committee, which included principals, PTA officers, North East Teachers Association president, and counseling coordinator. The proposed plan was modified to meet the needs of the schools involved.

The options included:

- How many schools should be included?
- How many teachers and how many students should be involved?
- Include elementary only, elementary and middle schools, or all levels?
- Which school campuses should be involved?
- Which content areas involved and which levels—low, regular, or enriched?
- Pay teachers a supplemental salary for involvement?
- How many parent-teacher conferences should be held and when?
- Hold special inservice for teachers involved?
- Should teachers be given release time for conferences?
- How much and what kind of material should be provided parents?
- How do we communicate with parents?

The options selected included:

(1) The steering committee selected five elementary schools, three middle schools, and one high school for a total of nine schools.

(2) The steering committee selected schools representing a cross section of the district's total socio-economic level.

(3) Thirty-two teachers were selected—
20 elementary
8 middle
4 high school
Each elementary teacher was to contact 30 parents and each secondary teacher was to contact 60 parents.

(4) Content areas chosen were math and language arts. The program concentrated on the regular and low-regular students.

(5) Teachers were paid a supplemental fee for their extra effort.

(6) Two parent-teacher conferences would be required for each student—one to be held in the first six-weeks of school, the other in the fourth six-weeks.

(7) Inservice sessions were provided for teachers during the year to upgrade their skills.

(8) Teachers involved in the program developed materials for parents.

(9) A letter from the superintendent and a pre-survey form were sent to each parent. The letter introduced the program to the parents. Then parent coffees and/or open houses were held on each campus to explain the intent of the program to the parents.

Strategy

Specific staff and other group/individual activities:

(1) Steering committee met four times to formulate and revise program.

(2) Four inservice meetings were held with steering committee and teachers.

(3) Parent coffees were held on each campus.

(4) Regular visitations by administrative staff and coordinator were made throughout the year.

(5) A luncheon meeting was held to honor teachers who participated in project. This was scheduled at the end of the school year.

(6) Selected teachers were permitted to visit other districts with similar programs and to report their findings.

Detailed time-line:

- Program approved in August.
- Schools selected in August.
- Teachers selected first week in September.

- Parent letters and pre-survey forms mailed first week in September.
- Teacher inservice third week in September.
- Parent handouts available last week in September.
- Parent coffees held between fourth week in September and middle of October.
- Parent conferences scheduled after parent coffee and all first conferences completed by December 1.
- Second teacher inservice held third week in October.
- Third teacher inservice scheduled for February, and the fourth held the third week in April.
- Second conferences held beginning in February and completed by April 15.
- Post-survey form to teachers and parents mailed May 1.
- Evaluation and luncheon meeting held third week in May.
- Revision began in June and completed in August.

Resources in excess of regular budget:
$35,700 was budgeted specifically for this program.

Results

(1) *Did the original plan work as expected?*
The original plan worked as expected.

(2) *Were there unexpected results, both good and bad?*
Even though the program as designed was a tremendous success, there were some unexpected results, many of which suggested changes for the 1982-83 school year. Some of the changes were:

- Only one parent conference to be held each year.
- More inservice on conferencing with parents is planned for secondary teachers.
- More time is planned for scheduled conferences.
- Each school staff will develop a campus plan of action.
- Counselors will be involved to a greater degree.
- During the first year secondary teachers were paid more than elementary teachers. This was done because secondary teachers had 60 students to contact and elementary had only 30, plus the fact that elementary teachers had time scheduled specifically for conferences. However, teachers found this unacceptable and a different method was devised.
- Materials developed during the first year required some revision.
- Monthly "activity" calendars for home use were created during the last two months of school and became popular with parents.
- A growing number of single parents were identified. These additional needs of parents are being addressed.

Positive Results of Program

(1) Parents who heard about the program from their friends wanted to be included.

(2) Students were excited about their parents' new interest in school.

(3) Students became more involved in academic studies.

(4) A noticeable improvement in student discipline occurred.

(5) Teachers became more interested in individual needs of their students.

(6) The program bolstered other district programs.

(7) "The Parent Handbook for TABS" developed by teachers and counselors received an Award of Excellence from the Texas School Public Relations Association.

(8) Local newspapers evidenced interest in becoming involved in the project and offered to conduct inservice for parents in ways to use newspapers at home.

How Was the Project Adapted To Those Results?

The positive results and parent response to the program were greater than the expectations. However, even though teachers were enthusiastic and positive concerning the program, they expressed an overwhelming request for more time to hold conferences.

Are There Plans for Future Modifications?

The program was modified after the first year. The results of the changes have been only positive. Plans are being made at this time to expand the program. Parents are most impressed and delighted with the opportunity to come to the school when there is not a problem and to be given materials to use with their students.

Evaluation

(1) Formal, based on survey or other quantifiable results

For the past two years a formal evaluation has been conducted on the program. The data obtained from the pre- and post-survey forms for teachers and parents have been used for this study. The results have been overwhelmingly positive.

(2) Informal

Informal information concerning the program has been gleaned from parents, board members, administrative staff, teachers, and the coordinator of the program.

vanadium pentoxide *n* : a yellowish red crystalline compound V_2O_5 used esp. in glass manufacture and as a catalyst
va·na·dous \və-'nād-əs, 'van-əd-\ *adj* : of, relating to, or containing vanadium esp. with a lower valence than in vanadic compounds
Van Al·len belt \va-ˌnal-ən-, və-\ *n* [James A. *Van Allen*] : a belt of intense ionizing radiation that surrounds the earth in the outer atmosphere
va·nas·pa·ti \və-'nəs-pət-ē, -'näs-\ *n* [Skt, forest tree, soma plant, lit., lord of the forest, fr. *vana* forest + *pati* lord] : a [illegible] vegetable fat used as a butter substitute
van·da \'van-də\ *n* [NL, ge[illegible]st[illegible]e, Skt, a parasitic plant] [illegible]
M[illegible]s[illegible]comes of sh[illegible]
[illegible] of Gm[illegible] *cap* [illegible] G[illegible] people w[illegible] of [illegible] between the Vi[illegible]ler, [illegible] Gaul, Spain, [illegible] northern A[illegible] [illegible] enturies A.D., and in 455 sacked R[illegible] [illegible] willfully or ignorantly destroys, damages, [illegible] property belonging to another or to the public — **van·dal** *adj, often cap* — **Van·dal·ic** \van-'dal-ik\ *adj*
van·dal·ism \'van-dᵊl-ˌiz-əm\ *n* : willful or malicious destruction or defacement of public or private property
van·dal·is·tic \ˌvan-dᵊl-'is-tik\ *adj* : of or relating to vandalism
van·dal·ize \'van-dᵊl-ˌīz\ *vt* **-ized; -iz·ing** : to subject to vandalism : DAMAGE — **van·dal·iza·tion** \ˌvan-dᵊl-ə-'zā-shən\ *n*
Van de Graaff generator \ˌvan-də-ˌgraf-\ *n* [Robert J. *Van de Graaff* †1967 Am physicist] : ELECTROSTATIC GENERATOR
van der Waals forces \ˌvan-dər-ˌwȯlz-\ *n pl* [Johannes D. *van der Waals* †1923 D physicist] : the relatively weak attractive forces that are operative between neutral atoms and molecules and that arise because of the electric polarization induced in each of the particles by the presence of other particles
van·ish \'van-ish\ *vb* [ME *vanisshen*, fr. MF *evaniss-*, stem of *evanir*, fr. (assumed) VL *exvanire*, alter. of L *evanescere* to dissipate like vapor, vanish, fr. *e-* + *vanescere* to vanish, fr. *vanus* empty] *vi* **1 a** : to pass quickly from sight : DISAPPEAR **b** : to pass completely from existence **2** : to assume the value zero ~ *vt* : to cause to disappear — **van·ish·er** *n*
vanishing cream *n* : a cosmetic preparation less oily than cold cream that is used chiefly as a foundation for face powder
vanishing point *n* **1** : a point at which receding parallel lines

Vandalism a vanishing word

BECAUSE WE'RE
POSITIVELY
NORTHSIDE
NORTHSIDE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Positively Northside
Northside Independent School District

Statement of Problem

Vandalism continues to detract from educational goals, programs, as well as physical plant investment.

A. **Situation:** Between September 1981 and August 1982, Northside Independent School District, San Antonio, suffered more than $90,000 damages from acts of vandalism and theft in a school system in which physical facilities are valued at $105 million.

B. **Desired Results:** Desired outcome is

- To eradicate incidents of vandalism and theft by securing involvement of school staff, students and community in an awareness and prevention campaign.
- To develop school and community pride.

The District

Northside Independent School District, San Antonio's fastest growing school district, lies on 350 square miles of urban/suburban Northwest Bexar County. NISD enrollment surpassed 35,000 students in 1982-83 and is the 11th largest school system in Texas. There are 2,300 teachers on 43 campuses. There are approximately 175,000 citizens living in NISD, 80,000 of whom are registered voters. They have approved more than $100 million in bond issues for new school construction during the past 10 years.

Analysis of Problem

A. **Specific Concerns:** To find out **why** vandalism is committed in the first place and **what** can be done to prevent it. To find out **where** vandalism occurs and to find out **who** vandals are. To find out **how** best to stop or reduce vandalism.

B. **Target Audiences:** The major thrust of "POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE" campaign will be aimed at the 35,000 students, their parents, and community members, followed by the citizens of Metropolitan San Antonio.

C. **Communication Needs:** To alert not just Northside staff and students, but all of San Antonio of the "POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE" campaign, let everyone know that "We know we have a problem and **this** is what we are going to do about it," and to invite total involvement in its solution.

Process Used

A. **Appoint** Anti-Vandalism Committee: The 11-member committee is led by the Director of Pupil Personnel and includes three school principals, two high school students, three central office staff members, one PTA member, and two representatives from the Board of Trustees. The committee members are appointed by the Board of Trustees.

B. **Research** literature and existing successful programs

C. **Identify** key contact people:

1. Law enforcement personnel
2. AACOG (Alamo Area Council of Governments)
3. Juvenile justice experts
4. Community organizations
5. Campus principals

D. **Decide** on logo/theme: "POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE" was the theme selected because it encompasses many areas of positive behaviors. For example, students who do not vandalize are Positively North-

side just like students who are National Merit Scholarships finalists. Students who report acts of vandalism and identify vandals are as Positively Northside as students who win in state math meets. Students who take care of their school by picking up papers off the floor are as Positively Northside as students who are safety patrols after school.

E. **Form** campus-level committees to plan individualized programs.

F. **Maintain** district-wide committee to coordinate and communicate campus, simultaneous to central program.

Strategy

A. **Specific Staff/Group/Individual Activities:** Northside was divided into four cluster areas, each with one high school and its "feeder" elementary and middle schools. Under the guidance of the Board-appointed Anti-Vandalism Committee, representatives from each school (the school principal or a person appointed by the principal) met and elected a cluster chairman. Meeting dates and sites were selected to brainstorm and develop suitable vandalism prevention and awareness processes for clusters followed by individual campus programs.

B. **Central Office Direction:** Under the leadership of the Anti-Vandalism Steering Committee (subsequently called the "POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE" Committee), the Office of Pupil Personnel and the Office of Public Information, a 12-pronged program was launched to supplement individual campus efforts. (see Section V-C)

1. **Posters:** Two anti-vandalism posters were designed, each to appeal to a different age group. The elementary-age poster depicted a talking school house telling the children: "You Take Care of Me and I'll Take Care of You. I'm Your School." The secondary-age poster depicted the word "Vandalism" disappearing from a dictionary page that defined vandalism. The slogan: Vandalism: A vanishing word. Each poster displayed the "POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE" logo. Posters were distributed to all schools, and other district facilities, where they are prominently displayed.

2. **Logo:** The "POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE" logo was designed and made available to the different departments that publish newsletters, including PTAs. Public Information Office wrote short articles to accompany logos.

3. **News Releases:** News releases were prepared and distributed to all media including television, radio, high school newspapers and daily and weekly newspapers. These efforts paid off with several unsolicited editorial endorsements from metropolitan and weekly papers. The committee was prepared to solicit endorsements if it had been necessary. High school papers also responded with feature length stories and television stations responded with feature length newscasts.

4. **Bumper Stickers:** A "Schools in Action: POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE" bumper sticker was printed and made available to all school staff and PTA members. News media representatives also received stickers. Several business offices requested some to place in their lobbies and/or waiting rooms. News releases accompanied bumper stickers to media telling public that the stickers were available free of charge by calling the central office or contacting a school. Bumper stickers are made available to patrons who attend NISD Board of Trustees meetings, and a stack is placed at front reception area in the central office. Bumper stickers were also placed on all district-owned vehicles, including

90 maintenance trucks. A letter from the superintendent to all staff asked that bumper stickers be placed on personal vehicles.

5. **Stationery:** Official Northside letterhead stationery was designed and printed for use by central office administrators and school principals. This item supplemented official district stationery and is used where appropriate.

6. **Nametags:** "POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE" nametags replaced the commercially produced "Hello, My Name Is" nametags. These nametags were made available to all staff members and used for events such as receptions, awards ceremonies, PTA meetings and school tours.

7. **Newsmaker Folder:** When a Northside employee or student is named positively in a news story, the superintendent sends them a "Newsmaker" notice congratulating that person for the "good press." The POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE logo and slogan have been incorporated into the design of the Newsmaker folder.

8. **Banner:** The bumper sticker was professionally enlarged into a 50-foot canvas banner now on permanent display at the Field House, site of hundreds of district-wide events.

9. **Marquee Messages:** Sample messages were sent to schools for display on their school marquees. Example: " Here at Jay High School, We are POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE."

10. **PhoneMate Message:** Central office phone answering machine includes the POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE message to patrons who called after hours for information..

11. **Parent Letter:** Parents were sent a letter informing them of the POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE campaign and urging their support and cooperation in talks with their children.

12. **Fight Song:** With the cooperation of the district Music Department, the POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE Fight Song was written and set to music. Choral and band arrangements will be taught and performed as a part of dance team routines.

C. **Individual School Efforts:** Because each of the 43 schools developed its own strategy to fight vandalism, there are too many to list. Each school did what it thought would work best on its campus. Here are some samples of individual school efforts:

1. **High School Level:** Students, PTA organizations and teachers spearheaded high school campus anti-vandalism campaigns under the guidance of the school principal. One high school service organization developed two plans of action.

a. One was aimed at the high school's elementary "feeder" schools. High school students wrote, directed and acted in a POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE skit that they performed for the elementary-age children, printed and distributed anti-vandalism coloring books, sponsored anti-vandalism poster contests and awarded prizes for the winners.

b. Service organization members developed middle school essay writing and logo design contests incorporating each school's mascot. They also presented class-produced slide tape shows on negative peer pressure and peer recognition, major causes of vandalism.

Other efforts included Pride Weeks and featuring speakers who were asked to talk about vandalism and school pride. Printed information on vandalism, drug abuse, and law enforcement services was distributed. Vandalism prevention poster contests, logo design contests, essay writing contests were all part of the effort to increase student pride in school and diminish vandalism problems. High school parking lots were checked for unlocked cars and reminder notices placed on those left unlocked. Extensive campus newspaper coverage included editorial support. Announcements by principals concerning vandalism were featured. Original video productions were used in the classroom by teachers who developed vandalism cause and effect units as part of the regular curriculum.

2. **Middle School Level:** Much of the middle school effort was presented in the classrooms by individual teachers discussing the reasons vandalism occurs and how it ultimately hurts the students and their tax-paying parents. Examples include:

   a. Incorporating vandalism prevention into curriculum

   b. Increased staff visibility in hallways during class breaks

   c. Poster contests, bulletin board displays, button design contests

   d. Campus newspaper coverage of "good things" students are doing

   e. Increased awareness of night janitorial staff to "keep their ears open" for suspicious activities

3. **Elementary School Level:** Probably the MOST IMPORTANT. The major objective here was to educate students about vandalism causes and prevention and instill self-respect and school pride at **an early age.** Elementary schools planned activities such as School Spirit Day and Police Appreciation Day. One school raised more than $1,500 and presented the check to the San Antonio Police Welfare fund out of respect for the law study unit. Its theme under the POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE Campaign is, "Men In Blue, We Love You." Teachers and counselors played an important role in the effort to communicate vandalism awareness in the elementary school.

Responsibilities of the Teacher:

1. **Explain** POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE in terms students can understand and include explanations of school rules.
2. **Incorporate** vandalism awareness and prevention into daily curriculum.
3. **Watch** for chronic absenteeism, dropping grades, change in behavior, or low self-esteem that indicate need for attention.
4. **Use** the small group teaching method so students can get all the attention they need at this young age.
5. **Notify** parents of good grades or accomplishments.
6. **Maintain** an open door relationship with children who wish to express concerns.

Responsibilities of the Counselor:

1. **Form** peer counseling groups.
2. **Encourage** staff-student interaction outside classroom, for example, in the lunchroom where teacher can be perceived as "human."

3. **Provide** avenues for expression: posters, essays, drawings.
4. **Encourage** students to report any acts of vandalism they witnessed and explain why it is all right to do so.
5. **Set up** Good Citizen Awards program and campus beautification projects.
6. **Help** develop a positive community attitude; increase awareness that school belongs to everyone and their help is needed to keep it free of vandalism.

Results

A. Northside's anti-vandalism program developed into a broad PRIDE IN SELF, COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL campaign. The broad-based scope contributed to the success of the campaign, producing school support beyond its original specific intent—vandalism prevention. District image has improved. Because of POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE, the belief that NISD is a good place to live, work and go to school has been reinforced, producing a community determined to help eliminate vandalism and increase pride.

B. Peer pressure to commit acts of vandalism has been significantly reduced, making it "not cool" to vandalize. Students realize that the school belongs to them and that their school is what they make it. Surveys indicate that students feel safe in Northside schools.

C. Surveys taken at the beginning of the campaign indicate that:

1. **High Schools**

50 percent of students felt that there were crime problems in their schools.

38 percent of students have observed vandalism acts.

29 percent of students reported these crimes and identified vandals.

54 percent of students felt it was their responsibility to report these crimes.

49 percent of students had something stolen from them at school.

*97 percent of students felt SAFE AT SCHOOL.

Vandalism ranked second in areas of concern after drugs.

2. **Middle Schools**

80 percent of students felt that there were crime problems in their schools.

29 percent of students have observed acts of vandalism.

21 percent of students reported these crimes and identified vandals.

84 percent of students felt it was their responsibility to report these crimes.

74 percent of students had something stolen at school.

*92 percent of students FELT SAFE AT SCHOOL.

Vandalism ranked second in areas of concern after drugs.

3. **Elementary Schools**

70 percent of students felt that there were crime problems in their schools.

34 percent of students have observed acts of vandalism.

67 percent of students have reported these crimes and identified vandals.

92 percent of students felt it was their responsibility to report these crimes.

72 percent of students had something stolen at school.

*96 percent of students FELT SAFE AT SCHOOL.

Vandalism and theft ranked first in areas of concern.

D. Monthly vandalism/theft reports:

Year	Amount	Board Action
	Vandalism/Theft	
1980-1981	$101,502	School Board raises concern; initiates more accurate reporting system to track the facts.
1981-1982	$90,482	School Board analyzes data; initiates staff study on recommended solutions.
1982-1983*	$74,049*	School Board appoints committee and implements POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE anti-vandalism campaign

*Of not 12-month figures at time of this Case Study.

Continued Plan of Action

A. Another survey is being made in September 1983 to compare with previous survey.

B. Curriculum development on all the levels is being planned. Emphasis on good citizenship expectations will continue.

1. Students will apply language arts skills by writing assignments on vandalism and its prevention.
2. Students will apply math skills by figuring vandalism costs necessary to repair or replace broken windows, locks, doors, and other items.
3. Students in vocational education classes will continue to practice good housekeeping skills by securing all equipment.
4. Students in theatre classes will write and perform anti-vandalism skits.
5. Students in physical education classes will continue to receive leadership and character building instruction.
6. Students in journalism classes will write feature stories on vandalism and continue to report on "good things students do."
7. Students in business education classes will continue to take care of their equipment and appreciate the fact that their classrooms may be prime targets for vandals and thieves.

C. Plans for the 1983-84 campaign include continued emphasis on the overall, umbrella POSITIVELY NORTHSIDE theme to make students and community more aware of problems.. They include expanded awareness into the areas of theft, discipline, drug abuse, negative peer pressure, campus maintenance, fighting, self-respect, alcohol abuse, and more positive interaction with law enforcement personnel.

D. More information on overall district vandalism costs and assistance in combatting localized acts will be made available to campus administrators.

E. Support from the Board of Trustees to eliminate vandalism from Northside Independent School District will continue.

Crisis Communications
Richardson Independent School District

Statement of Problem

During a tornado alert in the spring of 1982, two different administrators were called by two different building principals to inquire about closing school early because of the tornado alert. Appropriate, but different suggestions were made. One of the suggestions resulted in a conflict regarding bus schedules. At a subsequent meeting, principals agreed that there was a need for standardized procedures to handle crisis situations, including a flow chart and telephone lists. There were several questions about contacting newspapers, radio stations, and television news reporters.

Because of the media contacts, the Public Information Office volunteered to coordinate the development of a crisis communications plan during the 1982-83 school year. It was decided to publish a booklet or notebook containing the plan and to make it available to many educators for desk-top use or for ready access on a bookshelf.

The District

The Richardson Independent School District, has an area of 38.5 square miles. Its 34,600 students attend 49 schools including four high schools, 10 junior highs, and 35 elementaries. The RISD is a suburban school district on the north edge of Dallas populated by middle and upper-middle income families. Approximately 50 percent of the district's local taxes come from businesses, the rest from homeowners. During the 1983-84 school year, approximately 38 percent of the district's income for current operation will come from the state with the remaining 62 percent from local sources.

Specific Concerns: As work on the project began, it was clear that the superintendent should be one of the first notified in many crisis situations. A need for suggestions on primary actions and secondary actions was indicated. Proper in-service topics were to be listed. Broad distribution of the completed notebook was indicated.

Target Audiences: Principals and assistant principals, counselors, and teachers-in-charge (department chairmen, grade-level chairmen) were the first target audiences. Later, it was decided to add custodians, physical education teachers, secretaries, the teacher's lounge, and the school's professional library to the distribution list. Athletic directors and central administrators were sent reference copies.

Communications Needs: The notebook, designed to provide a quick reference tool to use in emergencies, could be updated annually. Phone lists were individualized for staff members in the communications chain. An existing plan for media contacts was modified and formalized.

Involvement of Staff: A notebook committee consisted of principals, assistant principals, secretaries, counselors, parents, and central administrators. The 30-member planning group represented a geographic cross-section of the school district. Coordination of the planning committee, format development of the notebook, printing and distribution of the finished product were under supervision of the public information director. The executive director for pupil personnel services is in charge of updating action sheets and distribution of remaining notebooks in stock. The superintendent kept board members aware of development of the *Crisis Communications Notebook. Each board member was also provided a reference copy.*

Process Used

The development of the notebook began in September and ended in May of the 1982-83 school year.

- **September**—Informal visits with principals and central administrators to get a feel for major areas of need in crisis communications; research letters sent to similar districts requesting their plans (some found; none quite like the RISD notebook that subsequently was developed.)
- **October**—All principals list topics needed in notebook; compiled list placed on rating sheet and distributed to three groups: elementary principals, secondary principals, and central administrators; ratings of all three groups clearly showed top ratings for the same 30-35 topics; low scoring topics were deleted.
- **November**—Principal volunteers for study committee requested; suggestions and consent of other study committee members sought to round out committee so it would represent a cross section of the district by geographic distribution, as well as job role and grade level distribution.
- **December**—Organization meeting held; three committees named (elementary level, secondary level, all level) and topics for study divided almost equally among them; subcommittee chairmen elected and topics for each group assigned; members research and write topics, generally ones for which each volunteered; mid-way progress meeting held; format for notebook selected from alternatives suggested by public information director; looseleaf cover designed and "tab" titles selected; orders placed for February delivery.
- **January**—Final report meeting held and all topics completed. No meetings lasted more than an hour. All meetings started on time, had a printed agenda, and were tightly organized. All members were notified by memo at least one week in advance.
- **February/March**—Typing of action sheets, table of contents pages and index pages completed, proofed and taken to printer; notebooks and "tabs" returned by outside contractor on time; principals list users.
- **April**—Hand collating of notebooks, identification cards, "tabs" and appropriate action sheets (color coded) completed; notebooks numbered; master distribution by buildings and office locations and job roles. Volunteers assist.
- **May**—Distribution of notebooks completed about May 5, approximately three weeks later than projected. Conversion of master distribution sheets begun on computer for rapid access for updating and for distribution of updated materials.

Financial Resources: Funding for the project was included in the regular budget of the Public Information Office as its major publication for the year. Costs were kept to a minimum by using staff members, volunteers, typed (rather than printed) action sheets, and the school district's printing services. Quality notebook binders and "tab" sheets were used because it was believed that the notebook would be in use for many years.

Results

A more modest product was conceived at the start of the project. Research into the topic showed that principals and other crisis communicators felt a need for a more comprehensive notebook of action ideas, phone lists, and a chart of the communications chain. The noteook was extremely well-received by its users. Copies are still being requested, within the district and by other organizations.

The project, because it was larger, was more time-consuming than originally conceived. That time heavily involved the public information director. When extra help was needed, the district's volunteer services department found clerks and parents to assist.

Essentially, the contents of the notebook will stand as they now exist. Some new action sheets may be added. The communications chain and phone lists will change annually. To date in August 1983, there are no plans for modifying the notebook or its action sheets.

Friends of Education
Spring Branch Independent School District

Statement of Problem

The formation of Friends of Education, a community relations program in the Spring Branch Independent School District, was predicated on two needs identified by the Board of Trustees and the General Superintendent:

1. The need for the public to have greater knowledge and understanding of the issues, problems, goals, and procedures of the school district.
2. The need for school district officials to understand the concerns and priorities of the public as they relate to the schools.

A major problem for officials of a school district the size of SBISD (28,000 students) is to establish effective channels for meaningful, two-way communications with the public. Traditional communications media such as newsletters, brochures, and press releases are limited in their ability to explain issues in depth and provide no opportunity for an exchange of ideas between the public and school officials. Open forums, on the other hand, are limited by their lack of structure and tendency to become too large, unwieldy and unproductive.

The SBISD Board of Trustees and General Superintendent met the problem by establishing a community relations program that involves selected parents and citizens representing all grades, schools, geographical areas, business, and civic interests.

Friends of Education seeks to:

1. Provide a forum for the exchange of information and ideas between the school district and the citizens.
2. Promote mutual understanding between the school district and the citizens concerning the educational issues and goals.
3. Foster community support for the goals and programs of the school district.
4. Establish a nucleus of pivotal, informed citizens who transfer their knowledge, understanding and support of the school district to their neighbors, business associates and others who live in the school district.

The District

Size:

ADA—28,000

Campuses—22 elementary, 8 junior high, 6 senior high schools

Type—Suburban

Socio-economic Makeup—predominantly middle to upper middle class; 85 percent of graduates are college-bound.

General wealth of district—$7.3 billion

Analysis of Problem

A. Specific Concerns:

1. Need to establish an effective channel for two-way communication with citizens.
2. Need to hear goals, priorities and concerns of the public as they relate to the schools.
3. Need to explain in a meaningful and in-depth manner the issues, problems, goals, and programs of the school district.
4. Need to create a nucleus of informed, supportive citizens.

B. Target Audiences:

- Parents of students at all grade levels

- PTA leaders
- School parent organization leaders (Booster clubs, etc.)
- Church leaders
- Civic club leaders
- Business and professional leaders
- Youth agency leaders (Scouts, etc.)
- Government officials
- Realtors
- University representatives
- Media representatives
- Student leaders
- Teacher leaders
- Senior citizens

C. Communications personnel and other staff involved:

1. The director of Information Services is project coordinator.
2. The publications editor assists in developing all printed material used in the project, including the invitation design, and the follow-up magazine sent to all participants.
3. The school principals identify parents to be invited each year.
4. Many school personnel submit program ideas.
5. Designated school personnel assist in the presentation of mini-sessions.
6. School board members submit program ideas, suggest names of participants and assist in presentation of topics.

Process Used

A. The preliminary planning for Friends of Education took place in an administrative team meeting held by the General Superintendent. Included in the meeting were the deputy superintendents for internal affairs, personnel, auxiliary services, finance, instruction, and administration. The director of Information Services was also present. At the first meeting a general discussion was held about the need for a community relations program based on community involvement. The director of Information Services was asked to draft some ideas and present them for discussion at a future meeting.

B. Options Considered:

- A program for business leaders only.
- A separate program for school leaders and parents only.
- A program open to the general public—open invitation.
- A program for selected respresentatives of all school audiences.

C. Option Selected:
Option four above because it seemed to most effectively answer the concern for meaningful communication with all audiences in the school district in a manageable format.

Strategy

Description of Project: Friends of Education meets twice annually, usually in September and April. At the fall meeting, participants learn of the school district's goals and concerns through a "State of the Schools" address by the General Superintendent. After the address, participants attend two of six or eight mini-sessions that are built around the goals and concerns outlined by the General Superintendent. The participants select in advance the sessions they wish to attend. These sessions are led by school personnel who are involved in directing or implementing the program under discussion. Participants are given an opportunity to ask questions of the program presenters and to offer suggestions. A formal evaluation instrument is completed by all participants.

At the spring meeting of Friends of Education, the general superintendent delivers an annual report of the district's accomplishments in the meeting the goals stated at the fall meeting. The general superintendent also address concerns identified by participants in writing on a special card included in their invitation to the meeting. The card is returned to the school district well in advance of the meeting so that the general superintendent can incorporate the questions and concerns into his presentation.

After both meetings, participants receive written follow-up reports summarizing the content of the discussions.

Time-Line

1. August—dates for two conferences are set.
2. September 1—All principals are asked to submit names of parents to be invited. Each elementary principal submits the name of the PTA president and two parents or parent couples from each grade level K-5. Each secondary principal submits the name of PTA president, booster club presidents, and three parents or parent couples from each grade level. Principals are requested to submit new names each year, not repeats of the previous year so that the composition of the audience changes each year.

   The director of Information Services prepares list of representatives of other groups to be invited. School board members and others make suggestions for participants to be invited.

   The director of Information Services, working with the administrative staff and school board, develops topics to be offered in fall forum.
3. Two to three weeks before fall meeting invitations and reply cards are mailed to selected participants. On the reply cards, participants select the two topic sessions they wish to attend.
4. One week before the meeting, reply cards are turned in, nametags are prepared, and catering arrangements are completed.
5. One week before meeting, all session leaders meet for a run-through of their presentation. All presentations are critiqued and suggestions for changes and improvements are made.
6. Two weeks before the spring meeting, invitations are sent to the same list of participants. The reply card includes space in which the participant may ask a question or state a concern he wishes the general superintendent to address.
7. One week before the spring session, a slide presentation giving the highlights of the year is completed by the director of Information Services and the director of Instructional Television. The presentation is critiqued by the school board and administrative team.
8. One week before the spring session, all replies are due in and catering arrangements are completed.

Resources

1. Printing—
   a. Invitations—$500 (In house printing)
   b. Follow-ups—$2,500 (Printing by commercial printer)
2. Postage for invitations and follow-ups—$600 (first class mail; reply cards are postage paid)
3. Meal-$5.00 per head

Results

The original plan worked as expected. The program was well-received from the beginning.

Modifications based on results:

1. The first year the meetings were held at lunchtime. This seemed to limit the number

of businessmen and working mothers who could attend. Changing the meeting to evening was an improvement.

2. The first year of evening meetings were well attended, but attendance improved in subsequent years when dinner was served. Food helps get people to a meeting.

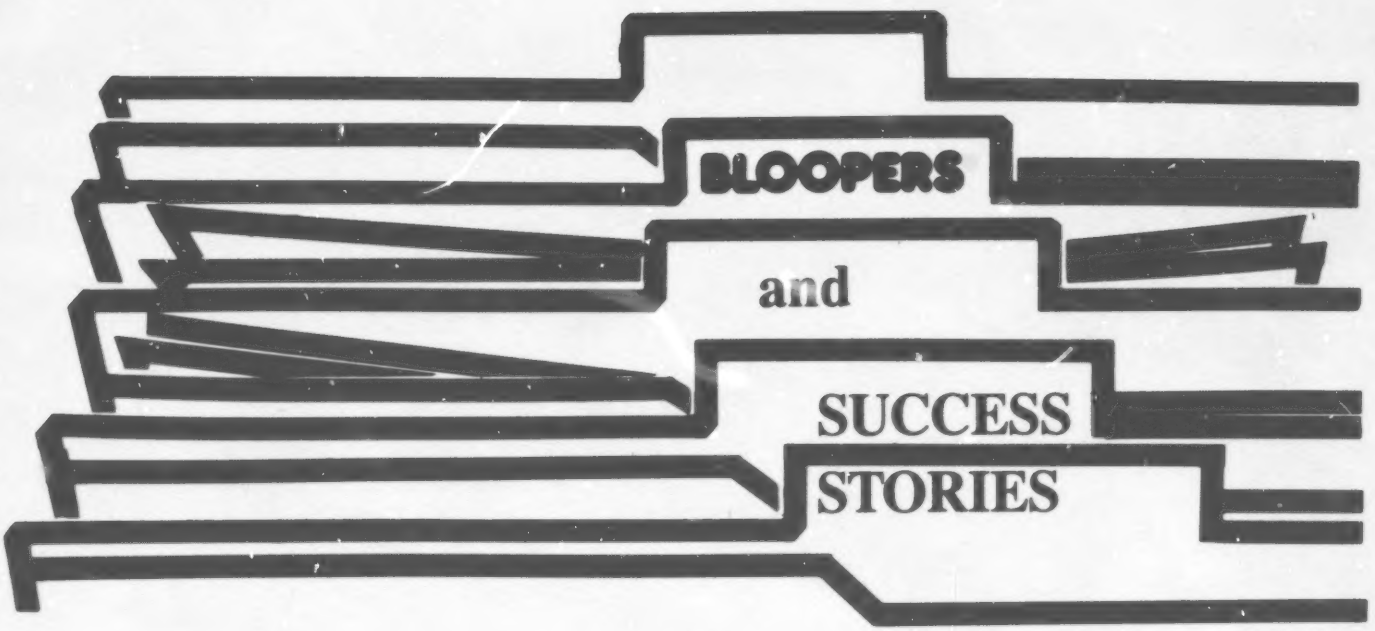
3. The first year offered only the general session with a presentation by the general superintendent and question and answer period in general session. Interest picked up in subsequent years when topic sessions following the general session were offered. Evaluations were excellent concerning the new format.

Evaluation

Based on format evaluations obtained by analysis of an evaluation instrument completed by all participants, most participants rate the meeting in terms of stated objectives as very positively. Criticisms are usually based on attendance in topic sessions where participants are not given ample opportunity to express their questions and opinions.

Informal evaluations indicate that those selected to attend consider it an honor and an opportunity.

The highest percentage of attendance is among parents who are more likely to attend one or both sessions than are business leaders and others who do not have children in schools.


BLOOPERS
and
SUCCESS
STORIES

BLOOPER

It only takes a single phone call or letter from an irate (and often misinformed) teacher or administrator to harm your positive relationship with the news media. You can't keep your faculty and staff from blowing off in the wrong direction, but you can encourage members of the media to contact you personally when such situations occur. That will enable you to work with the angry party and the reporter to clear up any confusion—without jeopardizing the positive relationship you've worked so hard to cultivate.

—North East Independent School District

Success Story

The North East Independent School District in San Antonio is still getting mileage from a color photograph of about 20 of its elementary students. Taken 12 years ago, the photograph represents a cross-section of the district's school population and epitomizes the positive aspects of education in North East.

The photograph was originally enlarged to 40" x 60", mounted, framed and hung behind the podium in the board room at the district's central administrative offices. Since that time, it has been used in numerous publications and slide presentations to provide a personality graphic of North East's student population.

Parents of the children were invited to attend a reception in the board room at the original unveiling of the enlarged photograph. At that time the superintendent thanked the parents for allowing their children to represent education in the North East Independent School District and presented each family with an 11" x 14" print of the photograph.

Plans are currently being made to compile a follow-up report on each of the students in the now-famous picture.

—North East Independent School District

COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

TITLE VI, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; THE MODIFIED COURT ORDER, CIVIL ACTION 5281, FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT, EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS, TYLER DIVISION

Reviews of local education agencies pertaining to compliance with Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 and with specific requirements of the Modified Court Order, Civil Action No. 5281, Federal District Court, Eastern District of Texas, Tyler Division are conducted periodically by staff representatives of the Texas Education Agency. These reviews cover at least the following policies and practices:

(1) acceptance policies on student transfers from other school districts;

(2) operation of school bus routes or runs on a non-segregated basis;

(3) nondiscrimination in extracurricular activities and the use of school facilities;

(4) nondiscriminatory practices in the hiring, assigning, promoting, paying, demoting, reassigning, or dismissing of faculty and staff members who work with children;

(5) enrollment and assignment of students without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin;

(6) nondiscriminatory practices relating to the use of a student's first language; and

(7) evidence of published procedures for hearing compiaints and grievances.

In addition to conducting reviews, the Texas Education Agency staff representatives check complaints of discrimination made by a citizen or citizens residing in a school district where it is alleged discriminatory practices have occurred or are occurring.

Where a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is found, the findings are reported to the Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

If there is a direct violation of the Court Order in Civil Action No. 5281 that cannot be cleared through negotiation, the sanctions required by the Court Order are applied.

TITLE VII, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; EXECUTIVE ORDERS 11246 AND 11375; TITLE IX, 1973 EDUCATION AMENDMENTS; REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 AS AMENDED; 1974 AMENDMENTS TO THE WAGE-HOUR LAW EXPANDING THE AGE DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT ACT OF 1967; AND VIETNAM ERA VETERANS READJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1972 AS AMENDED IN 1974.

It is the policy of the Texas Education Agency to comply fully with the nondiscrimination provisions of all federal and state laws and regulations by assuring that no person shall be excluded from consideration for recruitment, selection, appointment, training, promotion, retention, or any other personnel action, or be denied any benefits or participation in any programs or activities which it operates on the grounds of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, handicap, age, or veteran status (except where age, sex, or handicap constitute a bona fide occupational qualification necessary to proper and efficient administration). The Texas Education Agency makes positive efforts to employ and advance in employment all protected groups.